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November 16, 1927

OUR VILLAGE:
COUNTRY STORIES, SCENES,
CHARACTERS,

&c. &c.

BY

MARY RUSSELL MITFORD,

AUTHOR OF

JULIAN, AND FOSCAR, TRAGEDIES; DRAMATIC SCENES,

&c. &c.

VOLUME III.



SECOND EDITION.



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P R E F A C E.

THOSE gentle readers, be they few or many, who may have paid the two Volumes entitled Our Village the compliment of holding them in recollection, will easily recognise the same locality, the same class of people, and often the same individuals in the present collection of Country Stories, which is, indeed, at all points, a continuation of the former work. The Authoress has only to hope that it may be received with similar indulgence ; to deprecate a too literal construction of facts and names and dates ; and to acknowledge that some of the papers now published have already appeared in various respectable periodicals of the day.

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INTRODUCTION.

EXTRACTS FROM LETTERS.

“ ANY changes in our Village since the last advices ? What news of May and Lizzy and Fanny and Lucy ? Is the pretty nymph of the shoe-shop married yet ? And does the Loddon continue to flow as brightly as when we gathered musk roses together in the old grounds of Aberleigh ?”

These interrogatories formed part of a letter from India, written by my pretty friend, Emily L., now the wife of an officer of rank on that station ; and my answer to her kind questioning, may serve to satisfy the curiosity of other gentle readers as to the general state of our little commonwealth, and form no unfit introduction to the more detailed narratives that follow. They who condescend to read the letter-press will have the advantage of my fair correspondent. Indeed I doubt whether she herself may not derive her first information from the printed book ; my epistle being, as far as I can judge, wholly illegible to all but the writer. Never was such a

manuscript seen ! for being restricted to one sheet of paper, and having a good deal of miscellaneous matter to discuss before entering on our village affairs, I had fallen into a silly fashion of crossing, not uncommon amongst young ladies ; so that my letter first written horizontally like other people's, then perpendicularly to form a sort of chequer-work, then diagonally in red ink,—the very crossings crossed !—and every nook and cranny, the part under the seal, the corner where the date stood, covered with small lines in an invisible hand, the whole letter became a mass of mysterious marks, a puzzle like a Coptic inscription, or a state paper in cypher to those unacquainted with the key. I must put an extract into print if only for the benefit of my correspondent ; and here it is.

“ ‘ Any change in our Village ?’ say you.—Why no, not much. In the outward world scarcely any, except the erection of two handsome red houses on the outskirts, which look very ugly just at present, simply because the eye and the landscape are unaccustomed to them, but which will set us off amazingly when the trees and the buildings become used to each other, and the glaring new tint is toned down by that great artist, the weather. For the rest the street remains quite *in statu quo*, unless we may count for alteration *arrifamenti* which is taking place in the dwelling of our worthy neighbour the baker, whose oven fell in last week, and

is in the act of being re-constructed by a scientific brick-layer (Ah dear me! I dare say he hath a finer name for his calling) from the good town of B. The precise merits of this new oven I cannot pretend to explain, although they have been over and over explained to me; I only know that it is to be heated on some new-fangled principle, hot water, or hot air, or steam, or cinders, which is to cost just nothing, and is to produce the staff of life, crust and crum, in such excellence as hath not been equalled since Alfred, the first baker of quality on record, had the misfortune to scorch his hostess's cake. I suspect that the result of this experiment will not be very dissimilar; but at present it is a great point of interest to the busy and the idle. Half of our cricketers are there helping or hindering, and all the children of the street are assembled to watch the operation, or clustered into groupes near the door.

" You used to say, and there was too much truth in the assertion, that for pigs, geese and children, and their concómitants, dirt and noise, this pretty place was unrivalled. But then you were here when the two first evils were at their height, in June and July. At present the geese have felt the stroke of Michaelmas and are fatted and thinned; pigs too have diminished; though as the children are proportionably increased, we are not much better off in point of cleanliness, and much worse in regard to noise:—a pig being, except just when

ringing or killing, a tolerably silent animal ; and a goose, in spite of the old Roman story, only vociferous by fits and starts ; whereas little boys and little girls—at least, the little boys and little girls hereabout—seem to me on the full cry or the full shout from sunrise to sunset. Even the dinner hour, that putter down of din in most civilized countries, makes no pause amongst our small people. The nightingale who sings all day and all night to solace his brooding mate is but a type of their unwearying power of voice. His sweet harmony doth find intervals ; their discord hath none.

“ And yet they have light hearts too, poor urchins ; witness Dame Wilson’s three sun-burnt ragged boys who with Ben Kirby and a few comrades of lesser note, are bawling and squabbling at marbles on one side of the road ; and Master Andrews’s four fair-haired girls who are scrambling and squalling at baseball on the other ! How happy they are poor things, and with how few of the implements of happiness beyond sunshine and liberty and their own young life ! Even the baker’s and the wheelwright’s children are stealing a run and a race up the hill as they go to school, and managing to make quite noise enough to attract attention ; although being in whole frocks they are rather more quiet than their compeers in tatters, and hardly so merry ; it being an axiom which I have rarely known to fail in country life, that the poorer the urchin, the fuller of glee. Short of

starvation, nothing tames the elves. Blessed triumph of youthful spirits! merciful compensation for a thousand wants!

“ Even as I write there is another childish rabble passing the window in the wake of our friend Mr. Moore’s donkey-cart. You remember Mr. Moore’s fine strawberries, Emily? the real wood strawberry, which looked like a gem, and smelt like a nosegay? But strawberries are out of season now; and the donkey-cart has changed its gay summer freight of fruit and flowers and is coming down the hill heavily laden with a full dirty homely load of huge red potatoes, to vend per peck and gallon through the village, or perhaps to carry as far as B., where some amateurs of the ‘lazy root,’ curious in such underground matters, are constant customers to Mr. Moore’s ‘pink eyes.’ It is not, however, for love of that meritorious vegetable that the boys follow the potatoe-cart. One corner is parted off for apples, in hopes to tempt our thrifty housewives into the cheap extravagance of a pudding or a pie. Half a bushel of apples as yellow and mellow as quinces are deposited in one corner, and the young rogues have smelt the treasure out.

“ Now to answer your kind enquiries. May—to begin at home!—May—many thanks for your recollection of my favourite!—May is as well as can be expected. She is literally and figuratively in the straw, being con-

fined with one puppy—only one ; and presenting in her fair person a very complete illustration of the old proverb respecting a hen with one chick. Never was such a fuss made about a little animal since greyhounds were greyhounds, and the tiny creature is as pert, petulant and precocious a personage as any spoilt child that ever walked on four legs or two. I must confess, in vindication of May's taste, who never before shewed such absolute devotion to her offspring, that the puppy has beauty enough for a whole litter. It is fawn-coloured with a dash of white, and promises to be ticked. Are you sportswoman sufficient to know that *ticked* means covered all over with white spots about the size of a pea ? a great addition to greyhound beauty, and a sure sign of greyhound blood ; a mark of caste, as they say in your country, and one the more to be relied on since it is a distinction of nature, and not of man.

“ The shoemaker's pretty daughter is also ‘ as well as can be expected.’ She is out of doors to-day for the first day since her confinement, and the delicate doll-like baby, which she is tossing as lightly and gracefully as if it were indeed a doll, and shewing so proudly to her father's old crony, George Bridgwater, is her own. Her marriage confounded the calculations of all her neighbours, myself included : for she did not marry her handsome admirer Jem Tanner, who has wisely comforted himself by choosing another flame,—nothing so

sue a remedy for one love as rushing straight into another ; nor Daniel Tubb, the dashing horsedealer, who used to flourish his gay steed up the street and down the street, ‘ all for the love of pretty Bessie ;’ neither did she marry Joseph Bacon, the snug young grocer, who walked every Sunday seven miles to sit next her at chapel, and sing hymns from the same book ; nor her father’s smart apprentice, William Ford, although a present partnership in the business and a future succession would have made that match quite a *mariage de convenance* :—none of these, her known and recognized lovers, did the fair nymph of the shoe-shop marry, nor any of her thousand and one imputed swains. The happy man was one who had never been seen to speak to her in his life,—John Ford, brother to William, a tall, sinewy, comely blacksmith, who on six days of the week contrives so to become the anvil with his dingy leather cap, and his stiff leather apron, his brawny naked arms and smoky face, that he seems native to the element, a very Vulcan ; whilst on the seventh, he emerges like a butterfly from the chrysalis, and by dint of fine clothes and fair water, becomes quite the beau of the village, almost as handsome as Joel himself. Since he has been married to his pretty wife, every body remembers what a bright pattern of fraternal friendship John Ford used to be thought—how attentive to William ! how constant in his visits ! When William had a cold,

the winter before the wedding, John used to come and ask after him every night. O that love ! that love ! What fibs it makes honest people tell !

“ Lucy is gone—gone to superintend the samplers and spelling-books two counties off. Our blooming gipsy, Fanny, has also taken her departure. Her husband found that the gipsy blood could not be got over, especially as his pretty bride, besides her triple sins of gipsyism, of prettiness, and of being his bride, had the misfortune to catch, with a quickness which seemed intuitive, ways and manners suited to her new station, to behave as well as any of her neighbours, and better than most of them—an affront which the worthies of her society found unpardonable. So Thomas is gone to hold the same office at my Lord’s estate in Devonshire ; where, if they have the wit to keep their own counsels, the mésalliance will never be suspected, and Fanny will pass for a gamekeeper’s wife of the very first fashion.

“ Lizzy ! Alas ! alas ! you ask for Lizzy !—Do you remember how surely at the closed gate of the flower court, or through the open door of her father’s neat dwelling, we used to see the smiling rosy face, so full of life and glee ; the square sturdy form, strong and active as a boy ; the clear bright eyes, and red lips and shining curly hair, giving such an assurance of health and strength ? And do you not recollect how the bounding foot, and the gay young voice, and the merry musical

laugh seemed to fill the house and the court with her own quick and joyous spirit, as she darted about in her innocent play or her small housewifery, so lively and so vigorous, so lovely and so beloved ? Do you not remember, too, how when we stopped to speak to her at that ever-open door, the whole ample kitchen was strewed with her little property, so that you used to liken it to a great baby-house ? Here her kitten, there her doll ; on one chair an old copy-book, on another a new sash ; her work and needle-book and scissars and thimble put neatly away on her own little table ; her straw hat ornamented with a tuft of feathery grasses, or a garland of woodbine, hanging carelessly against the wall ; and pots of flowers of all sorts of the garden and the field, from the earliest bud to the latest blossom, ranged in the window, on the dresser, on the mantel shelf, wherever a jug could find room. Every thing spoke of Lizzy, her mother's comfort, her father's delight, the charm and life of the house ; and every body loved to hear and see so fair a specimen of healthful and happy childhood. It did one's heart good to pass that open door. But the door is closed now, always closed ; and the father, a hale and comely man, of middle age, is become all at once old and bent and broken ; and the smiling placid mother looks as if she would never smile again. Nothing has been displaced in that sad and silent dwelling. The straw hat, with its faded garland, still hangs against the

wall ; the work is folded on the little table, with the small thimble upon it, as if just laid down ; jars of withered flowers crowd the mantel and the window ;—but the light hath departed ; the living flower is gone ; poor Lizzy is dead ! Are you not sorry for poor, poor Lizzy ?

“ But this is too mournful a subject :—we must talk now of the Loddon, the beautiful Loddon—yes, it still flows ; aye, and still overflows, according to its naughty custom. Only last winter it filled our meadows like a lake ; rushed over our mill-dams like a cataract, and played such pranks with the old arch at York-pool, that people were fain to boat it betwixt here and Aberleigh ; and the bridge having been denounced as dangerous in summer and impassable in winter, is like to cause a dispute between those two grand abstractions, the parish and the county, each of which wishes to turn the cost of rebuilding on the other. By their own account, they are two of the poorest personages in his Majesty’s dominions ; full of debt and difficulty, and exceedingly likely to go to law on the case, by way of amending their condition. The pretty naughty river ! There it flows bright and clear, as when we walked by its banks to the old house at Aberleigh, looking as innocent and unconscious as if its victim, the bridge, had not been indicted—No—that’s not the word !—*presented* at the Quarter Sessions ; as if a worshipful committee were not sitting to en-

quire into its malversations ; and an ancient and well-reputed parish and a respectable midland county going together by the ears in consequence of its delinquency. There it flows clear and bright through the beautiful grounds of Aberleigh ! The ruined mansion has been entirely pulled down ; but the lime trees remain, and the magnificent poplars and the gay wilderness of shrub and flower. The Fishing-house has been repaired by the delicate hand of taste, and it is a fairy scene still ; a scene worthy of its owners and its neighbours, wanting nothing in my eyes but you to come and look at it.

“ Come very soon, my dear Emily ! Tell Colonel L. with our kindest remembrances, that we shall never love him quite so well as he deserves, until he brings you back to us. Come very soon ! and in the mean while be sure you send me a full account of yourself and your ‘ whereabouts,’ and do not fail to repay my brief notices of the simple scenery and humble denizens of our Village, by gorgeous stories of oriental wonders, of the Ganges, the Palmettos, the Elephants, and the Hindoos.

“ And now, my dear friend, farewell ! ”

“ Ever most affectionately your’s,”

&c. &c. &c.

GRACE NEVILLE.

Two or three winters ago, our little village had the good fortune to have its curiosity excited by the sudden appearance of a lovely and elegant young woman, as an inmate in the house of Mr. Martin, a respectable farmer in the place. The pleasure of talking over a new-comer in a country village, which, much as I love country villages, does, I confess, occasionally labour under a stagnation of topics, must not be lightly estimated. In the present instance the enjoyment was greatly increased by the opportune moment at which it occurred, just before Christmas, so that conjecture was happily afloat in all the parties of that merry time, enlivened the tea-table, and gave zest and animation to the supper. There was, too, a slight shade of mystery, a difficulty in coming at the truth, which made the subject unusually poignant. Talk her over as they might, nobody knew any thing certain of the incognita, or her story; nobody could tell who she was, or whence she came. Mrs. Martin, to whom her neighbours were on a sudden most politely attentive in the way of calls and invitations, said nothing

more than that Miss Neville was a young lady who had come to lodge at Kinlay-end ; and except at Church, Miss Neville was invisible. Nobody could tell what to make of her.

Her beauty was, however, no questionable matter. All the parish agreed on that point. She was in deep mourning, which set off advantageously a tall and full, yet easy and elastic figure, in whose carriage the vigour and firmness of youth and health seemed blended with the elegance of education and good company. Youth and health were the principal characteristics of her countenance. There was health in her bright hazel eyes, with their rich dark eye-lashes; health in the profusion of her glossy brown hair; health in her pure and brilliant complexion; health in her red lips, her white teeth, and the beautiful smile that displayed them; health in her very dimple. Her manners, as well as they could be judged of in passing to and from church, leading one of the little Martins by the hand, and occasionally talking to him, seemed as graceful as her person, and as open as her countenance. All the village agreed that she was a lovely creature, and all the village wondered who she could be. It was a most animating puzzle.

There was, however, no mystery in the story of Grace Neville. She was the only child of an officer of rank, who fell in an early stage of the Peninsular war : her mother had survived him but a short time, and the little

orphan had been reared in great tenderness and luxury by her maternal uncle, a kind, thoughtless, expensive man, speculating and sanguine, who after exhausting a good fortune in vain attempts to realise a great one, sinking money successively in farming, in cotton-spinning, in paper-making, in a silk mill, and a mine, found himself one fair morning actually ruined, and died (such things have happened) of a broken heart ; leaving poor Grace at three-and-twenty, with the habits and education of an heiress, almost totally destitute.

The poor girl found, as usual, plenty of comforters and advisers. Some recommended her to sink the little fortune she possessed in right of her father in a school ; some to lay it by for old age, and go out as a governess ; some hinted at the possibility of matrimony, advising, that at all events so fine a young woman should try her fortune by visiting about amongst her friends for a year or two, and favoured her with a husband-hunting invitation accordingly. But Grace was too independent and too proud for a governess ; too sick of schemes for a school ; and the hint matrimonial had effectually prevented her from accepting any, even the most unsuspected, invitation. Besides, she said, and perhaps she thought, that she was weary of the world ; so she wrote to Mrs. Martin, once her uncle's housekeeper, now the substantial wife of a substantial farmer, and came down to lodge with her in our secluded village.

Poor Grace, what a change! It was midwinter; snowy, foggy, sleety, wet. Kinlay-end, an old manor-house dilapidated into its present condition, stood with its windows half closed, a huge vine covering its front, and ivy climbing up the sides to the roof—the very image of chillness and desolation. There was, indeed, one habitable wing, repaired and fitted up as an occasional sporting residence for the landlord; but those apartments were locked; and she lived like the rest of the family in the centre of the house, made up of great, low, dark rooms, with oaken panels, of long, rambling passages, of interminable galleries, and broad, gusty staircases, up which you might drive a coach and six. Such was the prospect within doors; and without, mud! mud! mud! nothing but mud! Then the noises;—wind, in all its varieties, combined with bats, rats, cats, owls, pigs, cows, geese, ducks, turkeys, chickens, and children, in all varieties also; for besides the regular inhabitants of the farm-yard,—biped and quadruped,—Mrs. Martin had within doors sundry coops of poultry, two pet lambs, and four boys from six years old downward, who were in some way or other exercising their voices all day long. Mrs. Martin too, she whilome so soft-spoken and demure, had now found her scolding tongue, and was, indeed, noted for that accomplishment all over the parish: the maid was saucy, and the farmer smoked.

Poor Grace Neville ! what a trial ! what a contrast ! she tried to draw ; tried to sing ; tried to read ; tried to work ; and, above all, tried to be contented. But nothing would do. The vainest endeavour of all was the last. She was of the social, cheerful temperament to which sympathy is necessary ; and having no one to whom she could say, how pleasant is solitude ! began to find solitude the most tiresome thing in the world. Mr. and Mrs. Martin were very good sort of people in their way—scolding and smoking notwithstanding : but their way was so different from hers : and the children, whom she might have found some amusement in spoiling, were so spoilt already as to be utterly unbearable.

The only companionable person about the place was 'a slipshod urchin, significantly termed "the odd boy;"' an extra and supplementary domestic, whose department it is to help all the others out of doors and in ; to do all that they leave undone ; and to bear the blame of every thing that goes amiss. The personage in question, Dick Crosby by name, was a parish-boy taken from the work-house. He was, as nearly as could be guessed (for nobody took the trouble to be certain about his age) somewhere bordering on eleven ; a long, lean, famished-looking boy, with a pale complexion, sharp thin features, and sunburnt hair. His dress was usually a hat without a crown ; a tattered round frock ; stockings that scarcely covered his ankles, and shoes that hung on his feet by

the middle like clogs, down at heel, and open at toe. Yet, underneath these rags, and through all his huffings and cuffings from master and mistress, carter and maid, the boy looked and was, merry and contented ; was even a sort of a wag in his way ; sturdy and independent in his opinions, and constant in his attachments. He had a pet sheep-dog (for amongst his numerous avocations he occasionally acted as under-shepherd) a spectral, ghastly-looking animal, with a huge white head and neck, and a gaunt black body.—Mephistopheles might have put himself into such a shape. He had also a pet donkey, the raggedest brute upon the common, of whom he was part owner, and for whose better maintenance he was sometimes accused of such petty larceny as may be comprised in stealing what no other creature would eat, refuse hay, frosty turnips, decayed cabbage leaves, and thistles from the hedge.

These two faithful followers had long shared Dick Crosby's affections between them ; but from the first day of Miss Neville's appearance, the dog and the donkey found a rival. She happened to speak to him, and her look and voice won his heart at once and for ever. Never had high-born damsel in the days of chivalry so devoted a page. He was at her command by night or by day ; nay, “ though she called another, Abra came.” He would let nobody else clean her shoes, carry her clogs, or run her errands ; was always at hand to open

the gates, and chase away the cows when she walked ; forced upon her his own hoard of nuts ; and scoured the country to get her the wintry nosegays which the mildness of the season permitted, sweet-scented coltsfoot, china-roses, laurustinus, and stocks.

It was not in Grace's nature to receive such proofs of attachment without paying them in kind. Dick would hardly have been her choice for a pet, but being so honestly and artlessly chosen by him, she soon began to return the compliment, and showered on him marks of her favour and protection ; perhaps a little gratified, so mixed are human motives ! to find that her patronage was still of consequence at Kinlay-end.—Halfpence and sixpences, apples and gingerbread, flowed into Dick's pocket, and his outward man underwent a thorough transformation. He cast his rags, and for the first time in his life put on an entire new suit of clothes. A proud boy was Dick that day. It is recorded that he passed a whole hour in alternate fits of looking in the glass and shouts of laughter. He laughed till he cried, for sheer happiness.

I have been thus particular in my account of Dick, because, in the first place, he was an old acquaintance of mine, a constant and promising attendant at the cricket-ground—his temperament being so mercurial, that even in his busiest days, when he seemed to have work enough upon his hands for ten boys, he would still

make time for play ; in the second, because I owe to him the great obligation of being known to his fair patroness. He had persuaded her, one dry afternoon, to go with him, and let him shew her the dear cricket-ground ; I happened to be passing the spot ; and neither of us could ever exactly remember how he managed the matter, but the boy introduced us. He was an extraordinary master of the ceremonies, to be sure ; but the introduction was most effectually performed, and to our mutual surprise and mutual pleasure we found ourselves acquainted. I have always thought it one of the highest compliments ever paid me, that Dick Crosby thought me worthy to be known to Miss Neville.

We were friends in five minutes. I found the promise of her lovely countenance amply redeemed by her character. She was frank, ardent, and spirited, with a cultivated mind, and a sweet temper ; not to have loved her would have been impossible ; and she, beside the natural pleasure of talking to one who could understand and appreciate her, was delighted to come to a house where the mistress did not scold, or the master smoke ; where there were neither pigs, chickens, nor children.

As spring advanced and the roads improved, we saw each other almost every day ; the soft skies and mild breezes of April, and the profuse floweriness of hedge-row, wood and field, gave a never-failing charm to our long rural walks. Grace was fond of wild flowers, which

her *protégé* Dick was assiduous in procuring. He had even sacrificed the vanity of sticking the first bunch of primroses in his Sunday-hat to the pleasure of offering them to her. They supplied her with an in-door amusement ; she drew well, and copied his field nosegays with taste and delicacy. She had obtained, too, the loan of a piano, and talked stoutly of constant and vigorous practice, and of pursuing a steady course of reading. All young ladies, I believe, make such resolutions, and some few may possibly keep them ; Miss Neville did not.

However lively and animated whilst her spirits were excited by society, it was evident that, when alone, poor Grace was languid and listless, and given to reverie. She would even fall into long fits of musing in company, start when spoken to, droop her fair head like a snow-drop, and sigh, oh such sighs ! so long, so deep, so frequent, so drawn from the very heart ! They might, to be sure, have been accounted for by the great and sad change in her situation, and the death of her indulgent uncle ; but these griefs seemed worn out. I had heard such sighs before, and could not help imputing them to a different cause.

My suspicions were increased, when I found out accidentally that Dick and his donkey travelled every morning three miles to meet just such another Dick and such another donkey, who acted as letter-carriers to that side of the village. They would have arrived at Kinlay-end

by noon in their natural progress, but Grace could not wait ; so Dick and the donkey made a short cut across the country to waylay his namesake of the letter-bag, and fetch disappointment four hours sooner. It was quite clear that whatever epistles might arrive, the one so earnestly desired never came. Then she was so suspiciously fond of moonlight, and nightingales, and tender poesy ; and in the choice of her music, she would so repeat over and over one favourite duet, and would so blush if the repetition were remarked !—Surely she could not always have sung "*La ci darem*" by herself. Poor Grace Neville ! Love was a worse disease than the solitude of Kinlay-end.

Without pretending to any remarkable absence of curiosity on the one hand, or pleading guilty to the slightest want of interest in my dear young friend on the other, I was chiefly anxious to escape the honour of being her confidante. So sure as you talk of love, you nourish it ; and I wanted hers to die away. Time and absence, and cheerful company, and summer amusements would, I doubted not, effect a cure ; I even began to fancy her spirits were improving, when one morning towards the middle of May, she came to me more hurried and agitated than I had ever seen her. The cause, when disclosed, seemed quite inadequate to produce so much emotion. Mrs. Martin had received a letter from her landlord, informing her that he had lent to a friend

the apartments fitted up for himself at the farm, and that his friend would arrive on the succeeding day for a week's angling. "Well, my dear Grace, and what then?" "And this friend is Sir John Gower." "But who is Sir John Gower?" She hesitated a little—"What do you know of him?"—"Oh, he is the proudest, sternest, cruelest man! It would kill me to see him; it would break my heart, if my heart is not broken already." And then, in an inexpressible gush of bitter grief, the tale of love which I had so long suspected burst forth. She had been engaged to the only son of this proud and wealthy baronet, with the full consent of all parties; and on the discovery of her uncle's ruined circumstances, the marriage had been most harshly broken off by his commands. She had never heard from Mr. Gower since they were separated by his father's authority, but in the warmth and confidence of her own passionate and trustful love, she found an assurance of the continuance of his. Never was affection more ardent or more despairing. No common man could have awakened such tenderness in such a woman. I soothed her all I could; and implored her to give us the pleasure of her company during Sir John's stay: and so it was settled. He was expected the next evening, and she agreed to come to us some time in the forenoon.

The morning, however, wore away without bringing Miss Neville; dinner-time arrived and passed, and still

we heard no tidings of her. At last, just as we were about to send to Kinlay-end for intelligence, Dick Crosby arrived on his donkey, with a verbal request that I would go to her there. Of course I complied; and as we proceeded on our way, I walking before, he riding behind, but neither of us much out of our usual pace, thanks to my rapid steps, and the grave funereal march of the donkey, I endeavoured to extract as much information as I could from my attendant, a person whom I generally found as communicative as heart could desire.

On this occasion he was most provokingly taciturn. I saw that there was no great calamity to dread, for the boy's whole face was evidently screwed up to conceal a grin, which, in spite of his efforts, broke out every moment in one or other of his features. He was bursting with glee, which for some unknown cause he did not choose to impart; and seemed to have put his tongue under a similar restraint to that which I have read of in some fairy tale, where an enchanter threatens a loquacious waiting-maid with striking her dumb, if, during a certain interval, she utters more than two words,—yes and no. Dick's vocabulary was equally limited. I asked him if Miss Neville was well? "Yes." If he knew what she wanted? "No." If Sir John Gower was arrived? "Yes." If Miss Neville meant to return with me? "No." At last, not able to contain himself any longer, he burst into a shout something between laugh-

ing and singing, and forcing the astonished donkey into a pace, which, in that sober beast, might pass for a gallop, rode on before me, followed by the barking sheep-dog, to open the gate; whilst I, not a little curious, walked straight through the house to Miss Neville's sitting-room. I paused a moment at the door, as by some strange counteraction of feeling one often does pause, when strongly interested; and in that moment I caught the sweet notes of *La ci darem*, sung by a superb manly voice, and accompanied by Grace's piano;—and instantly the truth flashed upon me, that the old Sir John Gower was gathered to his fathers, and that this was the heir and the lover come to woo and to wed. No wonder that Grace forgot her dinner-engagement! No wonder that Dick Crosby grinned!

I was not mistaken. As soon as decorum would allow, Sir John carried off his beautiful bride, attended by her faithful adherent, the proudest and happiest of all odd boys! and the wedding was splendid enough to give a fresh impulse to village curiosity, and a new and lasting theme to our village gossips, who first and last could never comprehend Grace Neville.

A NEW MARRIED COUPLE.

THERE is no pleasanter country sound than that of a peal of village bells, as they come vibrating through the air, giving token of marriage and merriment; nor ever was that pleasant sound more welcome than on this still foggy gloomy November morning, when all nature stood as if at pause; the large drops hanging on the thatch without falling; the sere leaves dangling on the trees; the birds mute and motionless on the boughs; turkies, children, geese and pigs unnaturally silent; the whole world quiet and melancholy as some of the enchanted places in the Arabian tales. That merry peal seemed at once to break the spell, and to awaken sound, and life, and motion. It had a peculiar welcome too, as stirring up one of the most active passions in woman or in man, and rousing the rational part of creation from the torpor induced by the season and the weather at the thrilling touch of curiosity. Never was a completer puzzle. Nobody in our village had heard that a wedding was expected; no unaccustomed conveyance, from a coach to a wheel-barrow, had been observed passing up the

vicarage lane ; no banns had been published in church—no marriage of gentility, that is to say, of license, talked of, or thought of ; none of our village beaux had been seen, as village beaux are apt to be on such occasions, smirking and fidgetty ; none of our village belles ashamed and shy. It was the prettiest puzzle that had occurred since Grace Neville's time ; and, regardless of the weather, half the gossips of the street—in other words, half the inhabitants—gathered together in knots and clusters, to discuss flirtations and calculate possibilities.

Still the bells rang merrily on, and still the pleasant game of guessing continued until the appearance of a well-known, but most unsuspected equipage, descending the hill from the church, and shewing dimly through the fog the most unequivocal signs of bridal finery, supplied exactly the solution which all riddles ought to have, adding a grand climax of amazement to the previous suspense—the new married couple being precisely the two most unlikely persons to commit matrimony in the whole neighbourhood ; the only two whose names had never come in question during the discussion, both bride and bridegroom having been long considered the most confirmed and resolute old maid and old bachelor to be found in the country side.

Master Jacob Frost is an itinerant chapman, somewhere on the wrong side of sixty, who traverses the counties of Hants, Berks, and Oxon, with a noisy lum-

bering cart full of panniers, containing the heterogeneous commodities of fruit and fish, driving during the summer a regular and profitable barter between the coast on one side of us and the cherry country on the other. We who live about midway between these two extreme points of his peregrination, have the benefit of both kinds of merchandise going and coming ; and there is not a man, woman, or child in the parish who does not know Master Frost's heavy cart and old grey mare half a mile off, as well as the stentorian cry of " Cherries, crabs, and salmon," sometimes pickled, and sometimes fresh, with which he makes the common and village re-echo ; for, with an indefatigable perseverance, he cries his goods along the whole line of road, picking up customers where a man of less experience would despair, and so used to utter those sounds while marching beside his rumbling equipage, that it would not be at all surprising if he were to cry " Cherries—salmon ! salmon—cherries !" in his sleep. As to fatigue, that is entirely out of the question. Jacob is a man of iron ; a tall, lean, gaunt figure, all bone and sinew, constantly clad in a tight brown jacket with breeches to match, long leather gaiters, and a leather cap ; his face and hair tanned by constant exposure to the weather into a tint so nearly resembling his vestments that he looks all of a colour, like the statue ghost in *Doh Giovanni*, although the hue be different from that renowned spectre—Jacob being a

brown man. Perhaps Master Peter in *Don Quixote*, him of the ape and the shamoy doublet, were the apter comparison ; or, with all reverence be it spoken, the ape himself. His visage is spare, and lean, and saturnine, enlivened by a slight cast in the dexter eye, and diversified by a partial loss of his teeth, all those on the left hand having been knocked out by a cricket ball, which aided by the before-mentioned obliquity of vision, gives a peculiar one-sided expression to his physiognomy.

His tongue is well hung and oily, as suits his vocation. No better man at a bargain than Master Frost : he would persuade you that brill was turbot, and that black cherries were Maydukes ; and yet, to be an itinerant vender of fish, the rogue hath a conscience. Try to bate him down, and he cheats you without scruple or mercy ; but put him on his honour, and he shall deal as fairly with you as the honestest man in Billingsgate. Neither doth he ever impose on children, with whom, in the matter of shrimps, periwinkles, nuts, apples, and such boyish ware, he hath frequent traffic. He is liberal to the urchins ; and I have sometimes been amused to see the *Wat Tyler* and *Robin Hood* kind of spirit with which he will fling to some wistful pennyless brat, the identical handful of cherries which, at the risk of his character and his customer, he hath cribbed from the scales, when weighing out a long-contested bargain with some clamorous housewife.

Also he is an approved judge and devoted lover of country sports ; attends all poney races, donkey races, wrestling and cricket matches, an amateur and arbiter of the very first water. At every revel or Maying within six miles of his beat, may Master Frost be seen, pretending to the world, and doubtless to his own conscience (for of all lies those that one tells to that stern monitor are the most frequent), that he is only there in the way of business ; whilst in reality the cart and the old white mare, who perfectly understands the affair, may generally be found in happy quietude under some shady hedge ; whilst a black sheep-dog, his constant and trusty follower, keeps guard over the panniers, Master Frost himself being seated in full state amidst the thickest of the throng, gravest of umpires, most impartial and learned of referees, utterly oblivious of cart and horse, panniers and sheep-dog. The veriest old woman that ever stood before a stall, or carried a fruit-basket, would beat our shrewd merchant out of the field on such a day as that ; he hath not even time to bestow a dole on his usual pensioners the children. Unprofitable days to him, of a surety, so far as blameless pleasure can be called unprofitable ; but it is worth something to a spectator to behold him in his glory, to see the earnest gravity, the solemn importance with which he will ponder the rival claims of two runners tied in sacks, or two grinners through a horse-collar.

Such were the habits, the business, and the amusements of our old acquaintance Master Frost. Home he had none, nor family, save the old sheep-dog, and the old grey horse, who lived, like himself, on the road ; for it was his frequent boast, that he never entered a house, but ate, drank and slept in the cart, his only dwelling-place. Who would ever have dreamt of Jacob's marrying ! And yet he it is that has just driven down the vicarage lane, seated in, not walking beside, that rumbling conveyance, the mare and the sheep-dog decked in white satin favours, already somewhat soiled, and wondering at their own finery ; himself adorned in a new suit of brown exactly of the old cut, adding by a smirk and a wink to the usual knowingness of his squinting visage. There he goes, a happy bridegroom, perceiving and enjoying the wonder that he has caused, and chuckling over it in low whispers to his fair bride, whose marriage seems to the puzzled villagers more astonishing still.

In one corner of an irregular and solitary green, communicating by intricate and seldom-trodden lanes with a long chain of commons, stands a thatched and white-washed cottage, whose little dove-cot windows, high chimneys, and honey-suckled porch, stand out picturesquely from a richly-wooded back-ground ; whilst a magnificent yew-tree, and a clear bright pond on one side of the house, and a clump of horse-chestnuts over-hanging some low weather-stained outbuildings on the

other, form altogether an assemblage of objects that would tempt the pencil of a landscape-painter, if ever painter could penetrate to a nook so utterly obscure. There is no road across the green, but a well-trodden footpath leads to the door of the dwelling, which the sign of a bell suspended from the yew-tree, and a board over the door announcing "Hester Hewit's home-brewed Beer," denote to be a small public-house.

Every body is surprised to see even the humblest village hostel in such a situation; but the Bell is in reality a house of great resort, not only on account of Hester's home-brewed, which is said to be the best ale in the county, but because, in point of fact, that apparently lonely and trackless common is the very high road of the drovers who come from different points of the west to the great mart, London. Seldom would that green be found without a flock of Welch sheep, foot-sore and weary, and yet tempted into grazing by the short fine grass dispersed over its surface, or a drove of gaunt Irish pigs sleeping in a corner, or a score of Devonshire cows straggling in all directions, picking the long grass from the surrounding ditches; whilst dog and man, shepherd and drover, might be seen basking in the sun before the porch, or stretched on the settles by the fire, according to the weather and the season.

The damsel who, assisted by an old Chelsea pensioner minus a leg, and followed by a little stunted red-haired

parish-girl and a huge tabby cat, presided over this flourishing hostelry, was a spinster of some fifty years standing, with a reputation as upright as her person ; a woman of slow speech and civil demeanour, neat, prim, precise and orderly, stiff-starched and strait-laced as any maiden gentlewoman within a hundred miles. In her youth she must have been handsome ; even now, abstract the exceeding primness, the pursed-up mouth, and the bolt-upright carriage, and Hester is far from uncomely, for her complexion is delicate, and her features are regular. And Hester, besides her comeliness and her good ale, is well to do in the world, has money in the stocks, some seventy pounds, a fortune in furniture, feather-beds, mattresses, tables, presses and chairs of shining walnut-tree, to say nothing of a store of home-spun linen and the united wardrobes of three maiden aunts. A wealthy damsel was Hester, and her suitors must probably have exceeded in number and boldness those of any lady in the land. Welch drovers, Scotch pedlars, shepherds from Salisbury Plain, and pig-drivers from Ireland—all these had she resisted for five-and-thirty years, determined to live and die “ in single blessedness,” and “ leave the world no copy.”

And she it is whom Jacob has won, from Scotchman and Irishman, pig-dealer and shepherd, she who now sits at his side in sober finery, a demure and blushing bride ! Who would ever have thought of Hester’s marry-

ing ! And when can the wooing have been ? And how will they go on together ? Will Master Frost still travel the country, or will he sink quietly into the landlord of the Bell ? And was the match for love or for money ? And what will become of the lame ostler ? And how will Jacob's sheep-dog agree with Hester's cat ? These, and a thousand such, are the questions of the village, whilst the bells ring merrily, and the new married couple wend peaceably home.

OLIVE HATHAWAY.

ONE of the principal charms of this secluded village consists in the infinite variety of woody lanes, which wind along from farm to farm, and from field to field, intersecting each other with an intricacy so perplexing, and meandering with such a surprising round-about-ness, that one often seems turning one's back directly on the spot to which one is bound. For the most part those rough and narrow ways, devoted merely to agricultural purposes, are altogether unpeopled, although here and there a lone barn forms a characteristic termination to some winding lane, or a solitary habitation adds a fresh interest to the picture.

These lanes, with their rich hedge-rows, their slips of flowery greensward, and their profound feeling of security and retirement, have long been amongst my favourite walks; and Farley-lane is perhaps the prettiest and pleasantest of all, the shadiest in warm weather, and the most sheltered in cold, and appears doubly delightful by the transition from the exposed and open common from which it leads.

It is a deep narrow unfrequented road, by the side of a steep hill, winding between small enclosures of pasture land on one side, and the grounds of the Great House, with their picturesque paling and rich plantations, on the other ; the depth and undulations of the wild cart-track giving a singularly romantic and secluded air to the whole scene, whilst occasionally the ivied pollards and shining holly-bushes of the hedge-row, mingle with the laurels, and cedars, and fine old firs of the Park, forming, even in mid-winter, a green arch over head, and contrasting vividly with a little sparkling spring, which runs gurgling along by the side of the pathway. Towards the centre of the lane rises an irregular thatched cottage, with a spacious territory of garden and orchard, to which you ascend, first by a single plank thrown across the tiny rivulet, and then by two or three steps cut in the bank—an earthen staircase. This has been, as long as I can remember, the habitation of Rachel Strong, a laundress of the highest reputation in the hamlet, and of her young niece, Olive Hathaway. It is just possible that my liking for the latter of these personages may have somewhat biased my opinion of the beauty of Farley-lane.

Olive Hathaway has always appeared to me a very interesting creature. Lame from her earliest childhood, and worse than an orphan,—her mother being dead, and her father, from mental infirmity, incapable of supplying her place,—she seemed prematurely devoted to care and

suffering. Always gentle and placid, no one ever remembered to have seen Olive gay. Even that merriest of all hours, the noon-day play-time at school, passed gravely and sadly with the little lame girl. A book, if she could borrow one, if not, knitting or working for her good aunt Rachel, was her only pastime. She had no troop of play-fellows, no chosen companion,—joined in none of the innocent cabal or mischievous mirth of her comrades ; and yet every one liked Olive, even although cited by her mistress as a pattern of sempstress-ship and good conduct,—even although held up as that odious thing, a model,—no one could help loving poor Olive, so entirely did her sweetness and humility disarm envy and mollify scorn.

On leaving school she brought home the same good qualities, and found them attended by the same results. To Rachel Strong her assistance soon became invaluable. There was not such an ironer in the county. One could swear to the touch of her skilful fingers, whether in disentangling the delicate complexity of a point-lace cap, or in bringing out the bolder beauties of a cut-work collar; one could swear to her handywork, just as safely as a bank clerk may do to the calligraphy of a monied man on 'Change, or an amateur in art to the handling of a great master. There was no mistaking her touch. Things ironed by her looked as good as new, some said better; and her aunt's trade thrrove apace,

But Olive had a trade of her own. Besides her accomplishments as a laundress, she was an incomparable needle-woman ; could construct a shirt between sunrise and sunset ; had a genuine genius for mantua-making : a real taste for millinery ; and was employed in half the houses round as a sempstress, at the rate of eight-pence a day,—devoting by far the greater part of her small earnings to the comforts of her father, a settled inhabitant of the village workhouse. A harmless and a willing creature was poor William Hathaway ; aye, and a useful one in his little way. For my part, I cannot think what they would have done without him at the workhouse, where he filled the several departments of man and maid of all-work, digging the garden, dressing the dinner, running on errands, and making the beds. Still less can I imagine how the boys could have dispensed with him ; the ten-year-old urchins, with whom he played at cricket every evening, and where the kind and simple old man, with his tall, lean person, his pale, withered face, and grizzled beard, was the fag and favourite of the party, the noisiest and merriest of the crew. A useful and a happy man was poor William Hathaway, albeit the proud and the worldly-wise held him in scorn; happiest of all on the Sunday afternoons, when he came to dine with his daughter and her good aunt Rachel, and receive the pious dole, the hoarded halfpence or the “splendid shilling,” which it was her delight to accumulate for his

little pleasures, and which he, child-like in all his ways, spent like a child on cakes and gingerbread.

There was no fear of the source failing : for gentle, placid, grateful and humble, considerate beyond her years, and skilful far beyond her opportunities, every one liked to employ Olive Hathaway. The very sound of her crutch in the court, and her modest tap at the door, inspired a kindly, almost a tender feeling for the afflicted and defenceless young creature, whom patience and industry were floating so gently down the rough stream of life. Her person, when seated, was far from unpleasant, though shrunken and thin from delicacy of habit, and slightly leaning to one side from the constant use of the crutch. Her face was interesting from feature and expression, in spite of the dark and perfectly colourless complexion, which gave her the appearance of being much older than she really was. Her eyes, especially, were full of sweetness and power ; and her long straight hair, parted on the forehead and twisted into a thick knot behind, gave a statue-like grace to her head, that accorded ill with the coarse straw bonnet, and brown stuff gown, of which her dress was usually composed. There was, in truth, a something elegant and refined in her countenance ; and the taste that she displayed, even in the homeliest branches of her own homely art, fully sustained the impression produced by her appearance. If any of our pretty damsels wanted a

particularly pretty gown, she had only to say to Olive, “ Make it according to your own fancy ;” and she was sure to be arrayed, not only in the very best fashion, (for our little mantua-maker had an instinct which led her at once to the right model, and could distinguish at a glance between the elegance of a countess and the finery of her maid,) but with the nicest attention to the becoming in colour and in form.

Her taste was equally just in all things. She would select, in a moment, the most beautiful flower in a garden, and the finest picture in a room : and going about, as she did, all over the village, hearing new songs and new stories from the young, and old tales and old ballads from the aged, it was remarkable that Olive, whose memory was singularly tenacious for what she liked, retained only the pretty lines or the striking incidents. For the bad or the indifferent she literally had no memory : they passed by her “ as the idle wind that she regarded not.” Her fondness for poetry, and the justness of taste which she displayed in it, exposed poor Olive to one serious inconvenience ; she was challenged at being a poetess herself ; and although she denied the accusation earnestly, blushingly, even tearfully, and her accusers could bring neither living witness nor written document to support their assertion, yet so difficult is it to disprove that particular calumny, that in spite of her reiterated denial, the charge passes for true to this very

hour. Habit, however, reconciles all things. People may become accustomed even to that sad nickname an authoress. In process of time the imputed culprit ceased to be shocked at the sound, seemed to have made up her mind to bear the accusation, and even to find some amusement in its truth or its falsity. There was an arch and humourous consciousness in her eyes, on such occasions, that might be construed either way, and left it an even wager whether our little lame girl were a poetess or not.

Such was, and such is Olive Hathaway, the humble and gentle village mantua-maker ; and such she is likely to continue : for too refined for the youths of her own station, and too unpretty to attract those above her, it is very clear to me that my friend Olive will be an old maid. There are certain indications of character, too, which point to that as her destiny : a particularity respecting her tools of office, which renders the misplacing a needle, the loss of a pin, or the unwinding half an inch of cotton, an evil of no small magnitude ; a fidgetty exactness as to plaits and gathers ; a counting of threads and comparing of patterns, which our notable housewives, who must complain of something, grumble at as waste of time ; a horror of shreds and litter, which distinguishes her from all other mantua-makers that ever sewed a seam ; and, lastly, a love of animals, which had procured for her the friendship and acquaintance of

every four-footed creature in the neighbourhood. This is the most suspicious symptom of all. Not only is she followed and idolized by the poor old car which Rachel Strong keeps to guard her house, and the still more aged donkey that carries home her linen, but every cat, dog, or bird, every variety of domestic pet that she finds in the different houses where she works, immediately following the strange instinct by which animals, as well as children, discover who likes them, makes up to, and courts Olive Hathaway. For her doth Farmer Brookes's mastiff—surliest of watch dogs!—pretermit his incessant bark; for her, and for her only, will Dame Wheeler's tabby cease to spit and erect her bristles, and become, as nearly as a spiteful cat can become so, gentle and amiable; even the magpie at the Rose, most accomplished and most capricious of all talking birds, will say, "Very well, ma'am," in answer to Olive's "How d'ye do?" and whistle an accompaniment to her "God save the King," after having persevered in a dumb resentment for a whole afternoon. There's a magic about her placid smile and her sweet low voice, no sulkiness of bird or beast can resist their influence.

"And Olive hath abundance of pets in return; from my greyhound May-flower, downward; and indeed tales the whole animal world under her protection, whether pets or no; begs off condemned kittens, nurses sick ducklings, will give her last penny to prevent an unlucky

urchin from taking a bird's nest; and is cheated and laughed at for her tender-heartedness, as is the way of the world in such cases.

Yes, Olive will certainly be an old maid, and a happy one,—content and humble, and cheerful and beloved! What can woman desire more?

A CHRISTMAS PARTY.

THE wedding of Jacob Frost and Hester Hewit took place on a Monday morning; and, on the next day (Tuesday), as I was walking along the common—blown along would be the properer phrase, for it was a wind that impelled one onward like a steam-engine—what should I see but the well-known fish-cart sailing in the teeth of that raging gale, and Jacob and his old companions, the grey mare and the black sheep-dog, breasting, as well as they might, the fury of the tempest. As we neared, I caught occasional sounds of “herrings—oysters!—oysters—herrings!” although the words, being as it were blown away, came scatteringly and feebly on the ear; and when we at last met, and he began in his old way to recommend, as was his wont, these oysters of a week old (note, that the rogue was journeying coast-wise, outward-bound), with a profusion of praises and asseverations which he never vented on them when fresh,—and when I also perceived that Jacob had donned his old garments, and that his company had doffed their bridal favours,—it became clear that our man of oysters

did not intend to retire yet awhile to the landlordship of the Bell ; and it was soon equally certain that the fair bride, thus deserted in the very outset of the honeymoon, intended to maintain a full and undisputed dominion over her own territories—she herself, and her whole establishment—the lame ostler, who still called her Mistress Hester—the red-haired charity girl, and the tabby cat, still remaining in full activity ; whilst the very inscription of her maiden days, “ Hester Hewit’s home-brewed,” still continued to figure above the door of that respectable hostelry. Two days after the wedding, that happy event seemed to be most comfortably forgotten by all the parties concerned—the only persons who took any note of the affair being precisely those who had nothing to do with the matter ; that is to say, all the gossips of the neighbourhood, male and female—who did, it must be confessed, lift up their hands, and shake their heads, and bless themselves, and wonder what this world would come to.

On the succeeding Saturday, however, his regular day, Jacob reappeared on the road; and, after a pretty long traffic in the village, took his way to the Bell ; and, the next morning, the whole *cortège*, bride and bridegroom, lame ostler, red-haired lass, grey mare, and black sheep-dog, adorned exactly as on the preceding Monday, made their appearance at church ; Jacob looking, as aforetime, very knowing—Hester, as usual, very de-

mure. After the service there was a grand assemblage of Master Frost's acquaintances ; for, between his customers and his playmates, Jacob was on intimate terms with half the parish—and many jokes were prepared on his smuggled marriage and subsequent desertion ;—but he of the brown jerkin evaded them all, by handing his fair lady into the cart, lifting the poor parish girl beside her, and even lending a friendly hoist to the lame ostler ; after which he drove off, with a knowing nod, in total silence ; being thereunto prompted partly by his wife's intreaties, partly by a sound more powerful over his associations—an impatient neigh from the old grey mare, who, never having attended church before, had begun to weary of the length of the service, and to wonder on what new course of duty she and her master were entering.

By this despatch, our new-married couple certainly contrived to evade the main broadside of jokes prepared for their reception ; but a few random jests, flung after them at a venture, hit notwithstanding ; and one amongst them, containing an insinuation that Jacob had stolen a match to avoid keeping the wedding, touched our bridegroom, a man of mettle in his way, on the very point of honour —the more especially as it proceeded from a bluff old bachelor of his own standing—honest George Bridgewater, of the Lea—at whose hospitable gate he had discussed many a jug of ale and knoll of bacon, whilst

hearing and telling the news of the country side. George Bridgwater to suspect him of stinginess!—the thought was insupportable. Before he reached the Bell he had formed, and communicated to Hester, the spirited resolution of giving a splendid party in the Christmas week—a sort of wedding-feast or house-warming; consisting of smoking and cards for the old, dancing and singing for the young, and eating and drinking for all ages; and, in spite of Hester's decided disapprobation, invitations were given and preparations entered on forthwith.

Sooth to say, such are the sad contradictions of poor human nature, that Mrs. Frost's displeasure, albeit a bride in the honey-moon, not only entirely failed in persuading Master Frost to change his plan, but even seemed to render him more confirmed and resolute in his purpose. Hester was a thrifty housewife; and although Jacob was apparently, after his fashion, a very gallant and affectionate husband, and although her interest had now become his—and of his own interest none had ever suspected him to be careless—yet he did certainly take a certain sly pleasure in making an attack at once on her boards and her habits, and forcing her into a gaiety and an outlay which made the poor bride start back aghast. (The full extent of Hester's misfortune in this ball, did not, however, occur upon her first coming. She had been

accustomed to the speculating hospitality of the Christmas parties at the Rose, whose host was wont at tide times to give a supper to his customers, that is to say, to furnish the eatables thereof—the leg of mutton and turnips, the fat goose and apple-sauce, and the huge plum-puddings—of which light viands that meal usually consisted, on an understanding that the aforesaid customers were to pay for the drinkables therewith consumed ; and, from the length of the sittings, as well as the reports current on such occasions, Hester was pretty well assured that the expenditure had been most judicious, and that the leg of mutton and trimmings had been paid for over and over. She herself being, as she expressed it, “ a lone woman, and apt to be put upon,” had never gone farther in these matters than a cup of hyson and muffins, and a glass of hot elder-wine, to some of her cronies in the neighbourhood ; but, having considerable confidence both in the extent of Jacob’s connexions and their tippling propensities, as well as in that faculty of getting tipsy and making tipsy in Jacob himself, which she regarded “ with one auspicious and one dropping eye,” as good and bad for her trade, she had at first no very great objection to try for once the experiment of a Christmas party ; nor was she so much startled at the idea of a dance—dancing, as she observed, being a mighty provoker of thirst; neither did she very greatly object to her husband’s engaging old

Timothy, the fiddler, to officiate for the evening, on condition of giving him as much ale as he chose to drink, although she perfectly well knew what that promise implied ; Timothy's example being valuable on such an occasion. But when the dreadful truth stared her in the face, that this entertainment was to be a *bond fide* treat—that not only the leg of mutton, the fat goose, and the plum-puddings, but the ale, wine, spirits and tobacco were to come out of her coffers, then party, dancing, and fiddler became nuisances past endurance, the latter above all.

Old Timothy was a person of some note in our parish, known to every man, woman, and child in the place, of which, indeed, he was a native. He had been a soldier in his youth, and having had the good luck to receive a sabre wound on his skull, had been discharged from the service as infirm of mind, and passed to his parish accordingly ; where he led a wandering pleasant sort of life, sometimes in one public-house, sometimes in another—tolerated, as Hester said, for his bad example, until he had run up a score that became intolerable, at which times he was turned out, with the workhouse to go to, for a *pis aller*, and a comfortable prospect that his good humour, his good fellowship, and his fiddle, would in process of time be missed and wanted, and that he might return to his old haunts and run up a fresh score. When half tipsy, which happened nearly,

every day in the week, and at all hours, he would ramble up and down the village, playing snatches of tunes at every corner, and collecting about him a never-failing audience of eight and ten-year-old urchins of either sex, amongst which small mob old Timothy, with his jokes, his songs, and his antics, was incredibly popular. Against Justice and Constable, treadmill and stocks, the sabre-cut was a protection, although, I must candidly confess, that I do not think the crack in the crown ever made itself visible in his demeanour until a sufficient quantity of ale had gone down his throat, to account for any aberration of conduct, supposing the broadsword in question never to have approached his skull. That weapon served, however, as a most useful shield to our modern Timotheus, who, when detected in any outrageous fit of drunkenness, would immediately summon sufficient recollection to sigh and look pitiful, and put his poor, shaking, withered hand to the seam which the wound had left, with an air of appeal, which even I, with all my scepticism, felt to be irresistible.

In short, old Timothy was a privileged person; and terrible sot though he were, he almost deserved to be so, for his good-humour, his contentedness, his constant festivity of temper, and his good-will towards every living thing—a good-will which met with its usual reward in being heartily and universally returned. Every body liked old Timothy, with the solitary exception of

the hostess of the Bell, who, having once had him as an inmate during three weeks, had been so scandalized by his disorderly habits, that, after having with some difficulty turned him out of her house, she had never admitted him into it again, having actually resorted to the expedient of buying off her intended customer, even when he presented himself pence in hand, by the gift of a pint of home-brewed at the door, rather than suffer him to effect a lodgment in her tap-room—a mode of dismissal so much to Timothy's taste, that his incursions had become more and more frequent, insomuch that “to get rid of the fiddler and other scape-graces, who were apt to put upon a lone woman,” formed a main article in the catalogue of reasons assigned by Hester to herself and the world, for her marriage with Jacob Frost. Accordingly, the moment she heard that Timothy's irregularities and ill example were likely to prove altogether unprofitable, she revived her old objection to the poor fiddler's morals, rescinded her consent to his admission, and insisted so vehemently on his being unorder'd, that her astonished husband, fairly out-talked and out-scolded, was fain to purchase a quiet evening by a promise of obedience. Having carried this point, she forthwith, according to the example of all prudent wives, began an attack on another, and, having compassed the unordering of Timothy, began to bargain for uninviting her next neighbour, the widow Glenda.

Mrs. Martha Glen kept a baker's and chandler's shop in a wide lane, known by the name of the Broadway, and adorned with a noble avenue of oaks, terminating in the green whereon stood the Bell, a lane which, by dint of two or three cottages peeping out from amongst the trees, and two or three farm-houses, the smoke from whose chimneys sailed curlingly amongst them, might, in comparison with that lonely nook, pass for inhabited. Martha was a buxom widow, of about the same standing with Mistress Frost. She had had her share of this world's changes, being the happy relict of three several spouses; and was now a comely rosy dame, with a laughing eye and a merry tongue. Why Hester should hate Martha Glen was one of the puzzles of the parish. Hate her she did, with that venomous and deadly hatred that never comes to words; and Martha repaid the obligation in kind, as much as a naturally genial and relenting temper would allow, although certainly the balance of aversion was much in favour of Mrs. Frost. An exceedingly smooth, genteel, and civil hatred it was on both sides; such an one as would have done honour to a more polished society. They dealt with each other, curtseyed to each other, sate in the same pew at church, and employed the same charwoman—which last accordance, by the way, may partly account for the long duration of discord between the parties. Betty Clarke, the help in question, being a sharp, shrewish, vixenish

woman, with a positive taste for quarrels, who regularly reported every cool inuendo uttered by the slow and soft-spoken Mrs. Frost, and every hot retort elicited from the rash and hasty Martha, and contrived to infuse her own spirit into each. With such an auxiliary on either side, there could be no great wonder at the continuance of this animosity ; how it began was still undecided. There were, indeed, rumours of an early rivalry between the fair dames for the heart of a certain gay shepherd, the first husband of Martha ; other reports assigned as a reason the unlucky tricks of Tom Higgs, the only son of Mrs. Glen by her penultimate spouse, and the greatest pickle within twenty miles ; a third party had, since the marriage, discovered the jealousy of Jacob to be the proximate cause, Martha Glen having been long his constant customer, dealing with him in all sorts of fishery and fruitery for herself and her shop, from red-herrings to golden pippins ; whilst a fourth party, still more scandalous, placed the jealousy, to which they also attributed the aversion, to the score of a young and strapping Scotch pedlar, Sandy Frazer by name, who travelled the country with muslins and cottons, and for whom certain malicious gossips asserted both ladies to entertain a lurking *penchant*, and whose insensibility towards the maiden was said to have been the real origin of her match with Jacob Frost, whose proffer she had accepted out of spite. For my own

part, I disbelieve all and each of these stories, and hold it very hard that an innocent woman cannot entertain a little harmless aversion towards her next neighbour without being called to account for so natural a feeling. It seems that Jacob thought so too—for on Hester's conditioning that Mrs. Glen should be excluded from the party, he just gave himself a wink and a nod, twisted his mouth a little more on one side than usual, and assented without a word ; and with the same facility did he relinquish the bough of mistletoe, which he had purposed to suspend from the bacon-rack—the ancient mistletoe bough, on passing under which our village lads are apt to snatch a kiss from the village maidens : a ceremony which offended Hester's nicety, and which Jacob promised to abrogate ; and, pacified by these concessions, the bride promised to make due preparation for the ball, whilst the bridegroom departed on his usual expedition to the coast.

Of the unrest of that week of hustling preparation, words can give but a faint image—Oh, the scourings, the cleanings, the sandings, the dustings, the scoldings of that disastrous week ! The lame ostler and the red-haired parish girl were worked off their feet—“even Sunday shone no Sabbath day to them”—for then did the lame ostler trudge eight miles to the church of a neighbouring parish, to procure the attendance of a celebrated harpsichord player to officiate in lieu of Timothy;

whilst the poor little maid was sent nearly as far to the next town, in quest of an itinerant show-woman, of whom report had spoken at the Bell, to beat the tambourine. The show-woman proved undiscoverable; but the bassoon player having promised to come, and to bring with him a clarionet, Mrs. Frost was at ease as to her music; and having provided more victuals than the whole village could have discussed at a sitting, and having moreover adorned her house with berried holly, china-roses and chrysanthemums after the most tasteful manner, began to enter into the spirit of the thing, and to wish for the return of her husband, to admire and to praise.

Late on the great day Jacob arrived, his cart laden with marine stores for his share of the festival. Never had our goodly village witnessed such a display of oysters, muscles, periwinkles and cockles, to say nothing of apples and nuts, and two little kegs, snugly covered up, which looked exceedingly as if they had cheated the revenue, a packet of green-tea, which had something of the same air, and a new silk gown, of a flaming salmon-colour, straight from Paris, which he insisted on Hester's retiring to assume, whilst he remained to arrange the table and receive the company, who, it being now about four o'clock p.m.—our good rustics can never have enough of a good thing—were beginning to assemble for the ball.

The afternoon was fair and cold, and dry and frosty, and Matthews's, Bridgwaters, Whites, and Jones's, in short the whole farmerage and shopkeepery of the place, with a goodly proportion of wives and daughters, came pouring in apace. Jacob received them with much gallantry, uncloaking and unbonnetting the ladies, assisted by his two staring and awkward auxiliaries, welcoming their husbands and fathers, and apologizing, as best he might, for the absence of his helpmate ; who, “perplexed in the extreme” by her new finery, which happening to button down the back, she was fain to put on hind side before, did not make her appearance till the greater part of the company had arrived, and the music had struck up a country dance. An evil moment, alas ! did poor Hester choose for her entry ! for the first sound that met her ear was Timothy’s fiddle, forming a strange trio with the bassoon and the clarionet : and the first persons whom she saw were Tom Higgs cracking walnuts at the chimney-side, and Sandy Frazer saluting the widow Glen under the mistletoe. How she survived such sights and sounds does appear wonderful—but survive them she did—for at three o’clock, A.M., when our reporter left the party, she was engaged in a sociable game at cards, which, by the description, seems to have been long whist, with the identical widow Glen, Sandy Frazer and William Ford, and had actually won fivepence-halfpenny of

Martha's money; the young folks were still dancing gaily, to the sound of Timothy's fiddle, which fiddle had the good quality of going on almost as well drunk as sober, and it was now playing solo, the clarionet being *hors-de-combat* and the bassoon under the table. Tom Higgs, after shewing off more tricks than a monkey, amongst the rest sewing the whole card-party together by the skirts, to the probable damage of Mrs. Frost's gay gown, had returned to his old post by the fire, and his old amusement of cracking walnuts, with the shells of which he was pelting the little parish girl, who sate fast asleep on the other side; and Jacob Frost in all his glory, sate in a cloud of tobacco smoke, roaring out catches with his old friend George Bridgwater, and half a dozen other "drowthy cronies," whilst "aye the ale was growing better," and the Christmas party went merrily on.

A QUIET GENTLEWOMAN.

My present reminiscence will hardly be of the tenderest sort, since I am about to commemorate one of the oldest bores of my acquaintance, one of the few grievances of my happy youth. The person in question, my worthy friend, Mrs. Aubrey, was a respectable widow lady, whose daughter having married a relation of my father's, just at the time that she herself came to settle in the town near which we resided, constituted exactly that mixture of *juxta-position* and family connexion, which must of necessity lead to a certain degree of intimacy, whatever discrepancies might exist in the habits and characters of the parties. We were intimate accordingly; dined with her once a year, drank tea with her occasionally, and called on her every time that the carriage went into W—; visits which she returned in the lump, by a sojourn of at least a month every summer with us at the Lodge. How my dear mother endured this last infliction I cannot imagine: I most undutifully contrived to evade it, by so timing an annual visit, which I was accustomed to pay, as to leave home on the day before

her arrival and return to it the day after her departure, quite content with the share of *ennui* which the morning calls and the tea-drinkings (evils which generally fell to my lot) entailed upon me.

This grievance was the more grievous, inasmuch as it was one of those calamities which do not admit the great solace and consolation to be derived from complaint. Mrs. Aubrey, although the most tiresome person under the sun,—without an idea, without a word, a mere inert mass of matter,—was yet in the fullest sense of those “words of fear” a good sort of woman, well-born, well-bred, well-jointed, and well-conducted, a perfectly unexceptionable acquaintance. There were some who even envied me my intimacy with this human automaton, this most extraordinary specimen of still life.

In her youth she had been accounted pretty, a fair sleepy blue-eyed beauty, languid and languishing, and was much followed by that class of admirers, who like a woman the better the nearer she approaches to a picture in demeanour as well as in looks*. She had, however,

* One of her lovers, not quite so devoted to quietude in the fair sex, adventured on a gentle admonition. He presented to her a superb copy of the “Castle of Indolence,” and requested her to read it. A few days after, he inquired of her sister if his fair mistress had condescended to look into the book. “No,” was the answer; “No, but I read it to her as she lay on the sofa.” The gentleman was a man of sense. He shrugged his shoulders, and six months after married this identical sister.

with the disparity that so often attends upon matrimony; fallen to the lot of a most vivacious and mercurial country squire, a thorough-paced foxhunter, whose pranks (some of them more daring than lawful) had obtained for him the cognomen of “mad Aubrey;” and having had the good fortune to lose this husband in the third year of their nuptials, she had never undergone the fatigue and trouble of marrying another.

When I became acquainted with her, she was a sleek round elderly lady, with very small features, very light eyes, invisible eye-brows, and a flaxen wig. She sate all day long on a sofa by the fireside, with her feet canted up on an ottoman ; the ingenious machine called a pair of lazy tongs on one side of her, and a small table on the other, provided with every thing that she was likely or unlikely to want for the whole morning. The bell-pull was also within reach : but she had an aversion to ringing the bell, a process which involved the subsequent exertion of speaking to the servant when he appeared. The dumb-waiter was her favourite attendant. There she sate, sofa-ridden ; so immovable, that if the fire had been fierce enough to roast her into a fever, as once happened to some exquisitely silly king of Spain, I do think that she would have followed his example, and have staid quiet, not from etiquette, but from sheer laziness. She was not however unemployed ; your very idle people have generally some play-work, the more

tedious and useless the better ; her's was knitting with indefatigable perseverance little diamonds in white cotton, destined at some future period to dovetail into a counterpane. The diamonds were striped, and were intended to be sewed together so artistically, that the stripes should intersect each other, one row running perpendicularly and the next horizontally, so as to form a regular pattern ; a bit of white mosaic, a tessellated quilt.

At this work I regularly found Mrs. Aubrey when compelled to the "sad civility" of a morning call, in which her unlucky visitor had all the trouble of keeping up the conversation. What a trouble it was ! just like playing at battledore by one's self, or singing a duett with one's own single voice : not the lightest tap would mine hostess give to the shuttlecock ;—not a note woud she contribute to the concert. She might almost as well have been born dumb, and but for a few stray noes and yeses, and once in a quarter of an hour some savourless inquiry, she might certainly have passed for such. She would not even talk of the weather. Then her way of listening ! One would have wagered that she was deaf. News was thrown away upon her ; scandal did not rouse her ; the edge of wit fell upon her dullness like the sword of Richard on the pillow of Saladin. There never was such a woman ! Her drawing-room, too, jacked all the artificial aids of conversation ; no books, no newspapers,

no children, no dogs ; nothing but Mrs. Aubrey and her knitted squares, and an old Persian cat, who lay stretched on the hearth-rug, as impassable as his mistress ; a cat so iniquitously quiet that he would neither play, nor pur, nor scratch, nor give any token of existence beyond mere breathing. I don't think, if a mouse had come across him, that he would have condescended to notice it.

Such was the state of things within the room : without, it was nearly as bad. Her house, one of the best in W., was situate in a new street standing slant-ways to one of the entrances of the town ; a street of great gentility but of little resort, and, above all, no thoroughfare. So that after going to the window to look for a subject, and seeing nothing but the dead-wall of an opposite chapel, we were driven back to the sofa to expatiate for the twentieth time on Selim's beauty, and admire once again the eternal knitting. Oh the horror of those morning visits !

One very great aggravation of the calamity was the positive certainty of finding Mrs. Aubrey at home. The gentle satisfaction with which one takes a ticket from one's card-case, after hearing the welcome answer "my mistress is just walked out ! " never befel one at Mrs. Aubrey's. She never took a walk, although she did sometimes, moved by the earnest advice of her apothecary, get so far as to talk of doing so. The weather was

always too hot, or too cold ; or it had been raining ; or it looked likely to rain ; or the streets were dirty ; or the roads were dusty ; or the sun shone ; or the sun did not shine (either reason would serve—her laziness was much indebted to that bright luminary) ; or somebody had called ; or somebody might call ; or (and this I believe was the excuse that she most commonly made to herself) she had not time to walk on account of her knitting, she wanted to get on with that.

The only time that I ever saw her equipped in out-of-door-costume was one unexceptionable morning in April, when the sun, the wind, the sky and the earth, were all as bright, and sweet, and balmy, as if they had put themselves in order on purpose to receive an unaccustomed visitor. I met her just as she was issuing slowly from the parlour, and enchanted at my good fortune, entreated, with equal truth and politeness, that I might not keep her within. She entered into no contest of civility ; but returned with far more than her usual alacrity into the parlour, rung the bell for her maid, sate down on her dear sofa, and was forthwith unclogged, unshawled and unbonneted, seemingly as much rejoiced at the respite, as a school-boy reprieved from the rod, or a thief from the gallows. I never saw such an expression of relief, of escape from a great evil, on any human countenance. It would have been quite barbarous to have pressed her to take her intended walk ; and, more-

over, it would have been altogether useless. She had satisfied her conscience with the attempt, and was now set in to her beloved knitting in contented obstinacy. The whole world would not have moved her from that sofa.

She did however exchange evening visits, in a quiet melancholy way, with two or three ladies her near neighbours, to whose houses she was carried in the stately ease of a sedan-chair :—for in those days *flies* were not; at which times the knitting was replaced by cassino. Those visits were, if not altogether so silent, yet very nearly as dull as the inflictions of the morning ; her companions (if companions they may be called) being for the most part persons of her own calibre, although somewhat more loquacious. They had a beau or two belonging to this West Street coterie, which even beaux failed to enliven ; a powdered physician, rather pompous ; a bald curate, very prim ; and a simpering semi-bald apothecary, who brushed a few straggling locks up to the top of his crown and tried to make them pass for a head of hair ; he was by far the most gallant man of the party, and amongst them might almost be reckoned amusing.

So passed the two first years of Mrs. Aubrey's residence in W. The third brought her a guest whose presence was felt as a relief by every body, perhaps the only woman who could have kept her com-

pany constantly, to the equal satisfaction of both parties.

Miss Dale was the daughter of a deceased officer, with a small independence, who boarded in the winter in Charter-House Square, and passed her summer in visiting her friends. She was what is called a genteel little woman, of an age that seemed to vary with the light and the hour; oldish in the morning, in the evening almost young, always very smartly dressed, very good-humoured, and very lively. Her spirits were really astonishing; how she could not only appear gay, but be gay in such an atmosphere of dulness, still puzzles me to think of. There was no French blood either, which might have accounted for the phenomenon; her paternal grandfather having been in his time high sheriff for the county of Notts; a genuine English country gentleman—and her mother, strange to relate, a renegade quakeress, expelled from the Society of Friends for the misdemeanour of espousing an officer. Some sympathy might exist there; no doubt the daughter would have been as ready to escape from a community of lawn caps and drab gowns as the mother. Her love of pink ribbons was certainly hereditary; and, however derived, her temper was as thoroughly *couleur de rose* as her cap trimming. Through the long quiet mornings, the formal visits, the slow dull dinners, she preserved one unvarying gaiety, carried the innovation of smiles

amongst the insipid gravities of the cassine table ; and actually struck up an intermitting flirtation with the apothecary—which I, in my ignorance, expected to find issue in a marriage, and was simple enough to be astonished, when one morning the gentleman brought home, a cherry-cheeked bride, almost young enough to be his grand-daughter.

The loss of a lover, however, had no effect on Miss Dale's spirits. I have never known any thing more enviable than the buoyancy of her temper. She was not by any means too clever for her company, or too well-informed ; never shocked their prejudices, or startled their ignorance, nor ever indeed said any thing remarkable at all. On the contrary, I think that her talk, if recollected, would seem, although always amiable and inoffensive, somewhat vapid and savourless ; but her prattle was so effervescent, so *up*—the cheerfulness was so natural, so real,—that contrary to the effect of most sprightly conversation, it was quite contagious and even exhilarated, as much as any thing could exhilarate the sober circle amongst whom she moved.

She had another powerful attraction in her extraordinary pliancy of mind. No sooner had the stage-coach conveyed her safely to the door of the large house in West Street, than all her Charter-House Square associations vanished from her mind ; it seemed as if she had left locked up in her drawers with her winter apparel.

every idea not West Streetian. She was as if she had lived in W. all her days : had been born there, and there meant to die. She even divested herself of the allowable London pride, which looks down so scornfully on country dignitaries, admired the Mayor, revered the corporation, preferred the powdered physician to Sir Henry Halford, and extolled the bald curate as the most eminent preacher in England, Mr. Harness and Mr. Benson notwithstanding.

So worthy a denizen of West Street was of course hailed there with great delight. Mrs. Aubrey, always in her silent way glad to receive her friends, went so far as to testify some pleasure at the sight of Miss Dale ; and the Persian cat, going beyond his mistress in the activity of his welcome, fairly sprang into her lap. The visits grew longer and longer, more and more frequent, and at last, on some diminution of income, ended in her coming regularly to live with Mrs. Aubrey, partly as humble companion, partly as friend : a most desirable increase to that tranquil establishment, which was soon after enlarged by the accession of a far more important visitor.

Besides her daughter, whom she would have probably forgotten if our enquiries had not occasionally reminded her that such a person was in existence, Mrs. Aubrey had a son in India, who did certainly slip her memory, except just twice a year when letters arrived from Bengal. She herself never wrote to either of her children,

nor did I ever hear her mention Mr. Aubrey till one day, when she announced, with rather more animation than common, that poor William had returned to England on account of ill health, and that she expected him in W. that evening.

In the course of a few days my father called on the invalid, and we became acquainted. He was an elegant-looking man, in the prime of life, high in the Company's service, and already possessed of considerable wealth. His arrival excited a great sensation in W. and the neighbourhood. It was the eve of a general election, and some speculating aldermen did him the favour of making an attack upon his purse, by fixing on him as a candidate to oppose the popular member; whilst certain equally speculating mammas meditated a more covert attack on his heart, through the charms of their unmarried daughters. Both parties were fated to disappointment; he waved off either sort of address with equal disdain, and had the good-luck to get quit of his popularity almost as rapidly as he had acquired it.

Sooth to say, a man with more eminent qualifications for rendering himself disagreeable than were possessed by Mr. Aubrey seldom made his appearance in civilized society. He had nothing in common with his good-humoured mother but her hatred of trouble and of talking; and having the misfortune to be very clever and very proud, tall and stately in his person, with a head habi-

tually thrown back, bright black scornful eyes and a cold disdainful smile, did contrive to gratify his own self-love by looking down upon other people more affrontingly than the self-love of the said people could possibly endure. Nobody knew any harm of Mr. Aubrey, but nobody could abide him; so that it being perfectly clear that he would have nothing to say, either to the Borough or the young ladies, the attentions offered to him by town and country suddenly ceased; it being to this hour a moot point whether he or the neighbourhood first sent the other to Coventry.

He, on his part, right glad as it seemed to be rid of their officious civility, remained quietly in his mother's house, very fanciful and a little ill; talking between whiles of an intended visit to Leamington or Cheltenham, but as easily diverted from a measure so unsuited to his habits as an abode at a public place, as Mrs Aubrey herself had been from a morning walk. All the summer he lingered at W., and all the autumn; the winter found him still there; and at last, he declared that he had made up his mind to relinquish India altogether, and to purchase an estate in England.

By this time our little world had become accustomed to his haughty manner, which had the advantage of being equally ungracious to every one (people will put up with a great deal in good company; it is the insolence which selects its object that gives indelible offence);

and a few who had access to him on business, such as lawyers and physicians, speaking in high terms of his intelligence and information, whilst tradesmen of all classes were won by his liberality, Mr. Aubrey was in some danger of undergoing a second attack of popularity, when he completely destroyed his rising reputation by a measure the most unexpected and astonishing —he married Miss Dale, to the inexpressible affront of every young lady of fashion in the neighbourhood. He actually married Miss Dale, and all W. spoke of her as the artfullest woman that ever wore a wedding-ring, and pitied poor Mrs. Aubrey, whose humble companion had thus ensnared her unwary son. Nothing was heard but sympathy for her imputed sufferings on this melancholy occasion, mixed with abuse of the unfortunate bride, whose extraordinary luck in making so brilliant an alliance had caused her popularity to vanish as speedily as her husband's.

With these reports tingling in my ears, I went to pay the wedding visit to Mrs. Aubrey senior, delighted at the event myself, both as securing much of good to Miss Dale, who was just the person to enjoy the blessings of her lot, and pass lightly over the evil; and as a most proper and fitting conclusion to the airs of her spouse; but a little doubtful how my old acquaintance might take the matter, especially as it involved the loss of her new daughter's company, and must of necessity cause

her some little trouble. I was never more puzzled in my life, whether to assume a visage of condolence or of congratulation ; and the certainty that her countenance would afford no indication either of joy or sorrow, enhanced my perplexity. I was, however, immediately relieved by the nature of her employment ; she was sitting surrounded by sempstresses, at a table covered with knitting and wedding-cake, whilst her maidens were putting together, under her inspection, that labour of her life the tessellated quilt : the only wedding present by which she could sufficiently compliment her son, or adequately convey her sense of the merits and excellence of his fair bride ! Her pleasure in this union was so great that she actually talked about it, presented the cake herself, and poured out with her own hands the wine to be drunk to the health of the new married couple.

Mr. Aubrey had purchased a place in Devonshire, and six months after his mother quitted W. to go and live near him. But, poor dear lady, she did not live there—she died. The unsettling, and the journey, and the settling again, terrible operations to one who seemed, like the Turkish women, to have roots to her feet, fairly killed her. She was as unfit to move as a two-year old cabbage, and drooped, and withered, and dropped down dead of the transplantation. Peace to her memory ! the benediction that she would assuredly have preferred to all others. Peace to her ashes !

THE TWO VALENTINES.

VALENTINE'S Day is one of great stir and emotion in our little village. In large towns—especially in London—the wicked habit of quizzing has entirely destroyed the romance and illusion of that tender anniversary. But we in the country are, for the most part, uninfected by “over-wiseness,” or “over-niceness,” (to borrow two of Sir Walter Raleigh's quaint but expressive phrases), and are content to keep the gracious festival of love-making and *billets-doux*, as simply and confidingly as our ancestors of old. I do not mean to say, that every one of our youths and maidens pair on that day, like the “goldfinch, bullfinch, greenfinch, and all the finches of the grove.”—Heaven forbid!—Nor that the spirit of fun hath so utterly evaporated from us, that we have no display of innocent trick or harmless raillery on that licensed morn:—all that I contend for is, that, in our parts, some truth may be found lurking amidst the fictions of those annual rhymes—that many a village beau hath so broken the ice of courtship—and that many a village belle hath felt her heart throb, as she glanced at

the emblematic scroll, and tried to guess the sender, in spite of the assumed carelessness, the saucy head-tossings, and the pretty poutings with which she attempted to veil her real interest. In short, there is something like sincerity amongst us, even in a Valentine ;—as witness the number of wooings begun on the Fourteenth of February, and finished in that usual end of courtships and comedies—a wedding—before Whitsuntide. Our little lame clerk, who keeps a sort of catalogue *raisonnée* of marriages, as a companion to the parish-register, computes those that issue from the bursting Valentine-bag of our postman, at not less than three and a half per annum—that is to say, seven between two years.

But—besides the matches which spring, directly or indirectly, from the *billets* commonly called Valentines—there is another superstition connected with the day, which has no small influence on the destinies of our country maidens. They hold, that the first man whom they espy in the morning—provided that such man be neither of kin to them, nor married, nor an inmate of the same house—is to pass for their Valentine during the day; and, perhaps (for this is the secret clause which makes the observation important,) to prove their husband for life. It is strange how much faith they put in this kind of *sortes virgilianæ*—this turning over the living leaf of destiny; and how much pains they

will take to cheat the fates, and see the man they like best first in spite of the stars ! One damsel, for instance, will go a quarter of a mile about, in the course of her ordinary avocations, in order to avoid a youth whom she does not fancy ; another shall sit within doors, with her eyes shut, half the morning, until she hears the expected voice of the favourite swain ;—whilst, on their part, our country lads take care to place themselves each in the way of his chosen she ; and a pretty lass would think herself overlooked, if she had not three or four standing round her door, or sauntering beneath her window, before sunrise.

Now, one of the prettiest girls in our parish is, undoubtedly, Sally North. Pretty is hardly the proper phrase—Sally is a magnificent girl ;—tall, far above the common height of woman, and large in proportion—but formed with the exactest symmetry, and distinguished by the firm, erect, and vigorous carriage, and the light, elastic step, peculiar to those who are early accustomed to walk under burthens. Sally's father is an eminent baker—the most celebrated personage in our village ; besides supplying half the next town with genuine country bread, which he carries thither himself in his huge tilted cart, he hath struck into other arts of the oven, and furnishes all the breakfast-tables, within five miles, with genuine London rolls. No family of gentility can possibly get through the first meal with-

out them. The rolls, to be sure, are—just like other rolls—very good, and nothing more; but some whim of a great man, or caprice of a fine lady, has put them in fashion; and so Sally walks round the parish every morning, with her great basket, piled to the very brim, poised on her pretty head—now lending it the light support of one slender hand, and now of another; the dancing black eyes, and the bright blushing smile, that flash from under her burthen, as well as the perfect ease and grace with which she trips along, entirely taking away all painful impression of drudgery or toil. She is quite a figure for a painter, is Sally North—and the gipsy knows it. There is a gay, good-humoured consciousness of her power and her beauty, as she passes on her morning round, carolling as merrily as the lark over her head, that makes no small part of her charm. The lass is clever, too—sharp and shrewd in her dealings—and, although sufficiently civil and respectful to her superiors, and never actually wanting in decorum, is said to dismiss the compliments of some of her beaux with a repartee generally *brusque*, and frequently poignant.

Of beaux—between the lacqueys of the houses that she takes in her circuit, and the wayfarers whom she picks up on the road—Sally hath more than a court beauty; and two of them—Mr. Thompson, my lord's gentleman, a man of substance and gravity, not much

turned of fifty ; and Daniel Tubb, one of Sir John's gardeners, a strapping red-haired youth, as comely and merry as herself—were severally recommended, by the old and the young, as fitting matches for the pretty mistress of the rolls. But Sally silenced Mr. Thompson's fine speeches by a very stout, sturdy, steady " No ;" and even inflicted a similar sentence (although so mildly, that Daniel did not quite despair) on his young rival ; for Sally, who was seventeen last Candlemas-day, had been engaged these three years !

The love affair had begun at the Free School at Aberleigh ; and the object of it, by name Stephen Long, was the son of a little farmer in the neighbourhood, and about the same age with his fair mistress. There the resemblance ceased ; for Stephen had been as incomparably the shortest and ugliest boy in the school, as Sally was the tallest and prettiest girl--being, indeed, of that stunted and large-headed appearance which betokens a dwarf, and is usually accompanied by features as unpleasant in their expression as they are grotesque in their form. But then he was the head boy : and being held up by the master as a miracle of reading, writing, and cyphering, was a personage of no small importance at Aberleigh ; and Sally being, with all her cleverness, something of a dunce, owed to Stephen much obligation for assistance in the school business. He arranged, cast up, and set in order on the slate, the few straggling

figures which poor Sally called her sum—painted over, and reduced to something like form, the misshapen and disjointed letters in her copy-book—learnt all her lessons himself, and tried most ineffectually to teach them to her—and, finally, covered her unconquerable want of memory by the loudest and boldest prompting ever heard out of a theatre. Many a rap of the knuckles have Sally North's blunders cost Stephen Long, and vainly did the master admonish him to hold his tongue. Prompt he would—although so incorrigibly stupid was his fair mistress, that, even when the words were put into her mouth, she stumbled at repeating them; and Stephen's officious kindness commonly ended in their being punished in company—a consummation, for his share of which the boy was gallant enough to rejoice. She was fully sensible of this flattering devotion, and repaid it, as far as lay in her power, by taking him under her protection at playtimes, in return for the services which he rendered her in school; and, becoming more and more bound to him by a series of mutual good offices, finished by vindicating his ugliness, denying his pedantry, and, when twitted with his dwarfishness, boldly predicting that he would grow. They walked together, talked together, laughed, romped, and quarrelled—in short, it was a decided attachment; and when our village Romeo was taken as an apprentice by a cousin of his mother's—a respectable hosier in

Cheapside—it is on record, that his Juliet—the lightest-hearted personage in the neighbourhood—cried for an hour, and moped for a day. All the school stood amazed at her constancy!

Stephen, on his side, bore the test of absence, like a knight of Amadis his day. Never was *preux* chevalier so devoted to the lady of his love. Every letter home contained some tender message or fond inquiry; and although the messages became gradually less and less intelligible, as the small pedantry of the country schoolboy ripened into the full-blown affectation of the London apprentice, still Sally was far from quarrelling with a love message, on so small a ground as not understanding it; whilst, however mysterious his words might seem, his presents spoke his affection in a more homely and convincing language. Of such tokens there was no lack. The very first packet that he sent home, consisting of worsted mittens for his old grandmother, a pair of cotton hose for his sister, and a nightcap for his father, contained also a pair of scarlet garters for Sally; which attention was followed up at every opportunity by pincushions, ribbons, thimbles, needle-cases, and as great a variety of female ware as that with which Autolycus's basket was furnished. No wonder that Sally, in spite of occasional flirtations with Daniel Tubb, continued tolerably constant; especially as one of Stephen's sisters, who had been at service in London, affirmed

that he was so much improved, as to be one of the smartest beaux in all Cheapside.

So affairs continued until this identical Valentine's Day. Last spring, a written Valentine, exceedingly choice in its decorations, had made its appearance at Master North's ; rather out of date, it must be owned, since, being enclosed in a packet, to save postage, and sent by an opportunity, as the country phrase goes, it had been detained, either by accident or waggery, till the First of April ; but this was none of Stephen's fault ; there was the Valentine in the newest London taste, consisting of a raised groupe of roses and heart's-ease, executed on a kind of paper cut-work, which, on being lifted up, turned into a cage, enclosing a dove ;—tender emblem !—with all the rapidity of a change in a pantomime. There the Valentine was ;—equally known for Stephen's, by the savour of the verses and the flourish of the signature—the finest specimen of poetry and penmanship, as my friend the schoolmaster triumphantly asserted, that had ever been seen in Aberleigh. “The force of *writing* could no farther go ;” so, this year, our “good apprentice” determined to come himself to be her personal Valentine, and to renew if not complete their early engagement.

On this determination being announced to Sally, it occasioned no small perturbation in that fair damsel, equally alarmed at the mental accomplishments and

the personal defects of her constant swain. In fact, her feeling towards Stephen had been almost as ideal and unsubstantial as the shadow of a rainbow. She liked to think of him when she had nothing better to do; or to talk of him, when she had nothing better to say; or to be puzzled by his verses, or laughed at for his homage; but as a real substantial Valentine, a present wooer, a future husband, and he so ugly, and a poet too—Oh dear! she was frightened to think of it! This impression first broke forth to his sister—who communicated the news of his intended arrival—in a variety of questions, as to Stephen's height, and size, and shape, and complexion; especially as compared with Daniel Tubb's! and was afterwards displayed to that rustic adorer himself; not by words, indeed, but by the encouraging silence and saucy smile with which she listened to his account of the debarkation of his cockney rival, from the top of the B—— stage. “He's tinier than ever,” quoth Daniel, “and the smartest dandy that ever was seen. I shall be your Valentine, after all, Sally,” pursued her swain; “for I could hide him with the shadow of my fist.”

This was Valentine's-eve. Valentine's-morn saw Sally eyeing the two rivals, through a peep-hole in her little check curtain, as they stood side-by-side, on the green, watching for the first glimpse of their divinity. Never was seen such a contrast. Stephen, whose original

square dwarfishness had fined down into a miniature dandy—sallow, strutting, and all over small—the very Tom Thumb of apprentices!—Daniel, taller, bigger, ruddier, and heartier than ever—the actual Goliath of country lads! Never was such a contrast seen. At length, Sally, laughing, blushing, and bridling, sallied forth from the cottage—her huge roll basket, but not as usual filled with rolls, carried, not on her head, but in her hands. “I’m your Valentine, Sally! am I not?” exclaimed Daniel Tubb, darting towards her, “you saw me first; I know you saw me first,” continued the ardent lover, proceeding to claim the salute usual on such occasions. “Pshaw! nonsense! let me alone then, Daniel, can’t you?” was the reply of his mistress, advancing to Stephen, who perhaps dazzled by the beauty, perhaps astounded by the height of the fair giantess, remained motionless and speechless on the other side of the road. “Would you like a ride in my basket this fine morning, Mr. Stephen?” said the saucy lass, emptying all his gifts, garters, pincushions, ribbons, and Valentines from their huge reservoir, and depositing it on the ground at his feet. “Don’t be afraid; I’ll be bound to carry you as easily as the little Italian boy carries *his* tray of images. He’s not half the weight of the rolls—is he, Daniel?” pursued the unmerciful beauty. “For my part, I think he has grown shorter.—Come, do step in!” And, with the word, the tri-

umphant Daniel lifted up the discomfited beau, placed him safely in the basket, and hoisted the burthen on Sally's head—to the unspeakable diversion of that saucy maiden, and the complete cure of Master Stephen's love.—No need, after this, to declare which of the two rivals is Sally North's Valentine. I think, with the little clerk, that they will be married at Whitsuntide, if not before.

A COUNTRY APOTHECARY.

ONE of the most important personages in a small country town is the apothecary. He takes rank next after the rector and the attorney, and before the curate ; and could be much less easily dispensed with than either of those worthies, not merely as holding “ fate and physic” in his hand, but as the general, and as it were official, associate, adviser, comforter, and friend, of all ranks and all ages, of high and low, rich and poor, sick and well. I am no despiser of dignities ; but twenty emperors shall be less intensely missed in their wide dominions than such a man as my friend John Hallett in his own small sphere.

The spot which was favoured with the residence of this excellent person was the small town of Hazelby, in Dorsetshire ; a pretty little place, where every thing seems at a stand-still. It was originally built in the shape of the letter T ; a long, broad market-place (still so called, although the market be gone) serving for the perpendicular stem, traversed by a straight, narrow, horizontal street, to answer for the top line. Not one ad-

dition has occurred to interrupt this architectural regularity since ; fifty years ago, a rich London tradesman built, at the west end of the horizontal street, a wide-fronted single house, with two low wings, iron pallisades before, and a fish-pond opposite, which still goes by the name of New Place, and is balanced, at the east end of the street, by an erection of nearly the same date, a large, square, dingy mansion enclosed within high walls, inhabited by three maiden sisters, and called, probably by way of nickname, the Nunnery. New Place being on the left of the road, and the Nunnery on the right, the T has now something the air of the Italic capital *T*, turned up at one end and down on the other. The latest improvements are the bow-window in the market-place, commanding the pavement both ways, which the late brewer, Andrews, threw out in his snug parlour some twenty years back, and where he used to sit smoking, with the sash up, in summer afternoons, enjoying himself, good man ; and the great room at the Swan, originally built by the speculative publican, Joseph Allwright, for an assembly-room. That speculation did not answer. The assembly, in spite of canvassing and patronage, and the active exertions of all the young ladies in the neighbourhood, dwindled away and died at the end of two winters : then it became a club-room for the hunt ; but the hunt quarrelled with Joseph's cookety : then a market-room for the farmers ; but the farmers

(it was in the high-price time) quarrelled with Joseph's wine : then it was converted into the magistrates'-room—the bench ; but the bench and the market went away together, and there was an end of justicing : then Joseph tried the novel attraction (to borrow a theatrical phrase) of a billiard-table ; but, alas ! that novelty succeeded as ill as if it had been theatrical ; there were not customers enough to pay the marker : at last, it has merged finally in that unconscious receptacle of pleasure and pain, a post-office ; although Hazelby has so little to do with traffic of any sort—even the traffic of correspondence—that a saucy mail-coach will often carry on its small bag, and as often forget to call for the London bag in return.

In short, Hazelby is an insignificant place ;—my readers will look for it in vain in the map of Dorsetshire ;—it is omitted, poor dear town !—left out by the map-maker with as little remorse as a dropped letter !—and it is also an old-fashioned place. It has not even a cheap shop for female gear. Every thing in the one store which it boasts, kept by Martha Deane, linen-draper and haberdasher, is dear and good, as things were wont to be. You may actually get there thread made of flax, from the gouty, uneven, clumsy, shiny fabric, yclept whited-brown, to the delicate commodity of Lisle, used for darning muslin. I think I was never more astonished than when, on asking, from the mere

force of habit, for thread, I was presented, instead of the pretty lattice-wound balls or snowy reels of cotton, with which that demand is usually answered, with a whole drawerful of skeins, peeping from their blue papers—such skeins as in my youth a thrifty maiden would draw into the nicely-stitched compartments of that silken repository, a housewife, or fold into a congeries of graduated thread-papers, “ fine by degrees, and beautifully less.” The very literature of Hazelby is doled out at the pastry-cook’s, in a little one-windowed shop, kept by Matthew Wise. Tarts occupy one end of the counter, and reviews the other; whilst the shelves are parcelled out between books, and dolls, and gingerbread. It is a question, by which of his trades poor Matthew gains least; he is so shabby, so threadbare, and so starved.

Such a town would hardly have known what to do with a highly-informed and educated surgeon, such as one now generally sees in that most liberal profession. My friend, John Hallett, suited it exactly. His predecessor, Mr. Simon Shuter, had been a small, wrinkled, spare old gentleman, with a short cough and a thin voice, who always seemed as if he needed an apothecary himself. He wore generally a full suit of drab, a flaxen wig of the sort called a Bob Jerom, and a very tight muslin stock; a costume which he had adopted in his younger days in imitation of the most eminent physician of the next city,

and continued to the time of his death. Perhaps the cough might have been originally an imitation also, ingrafted on the system by habit. It had a most unsatisfactory sound, and seemed more like a trick than a real effort of nature. His talk was civil, prosy, and fidgety, much addicted to small scandal, and that kind of news which passes under the denomination of tittle-tattle. He was sure to tell one half of the town where the other drank tea, and recollect the blancmangers and jellies on a supper-table, or described a new gown, with as much science and unction as if he had been used to make jellies and wear gowns in his own person. Certain professional peculiarities might have favoured the supposition. His mode of practice was exactly that popularly attributed to old women. He delighted in innocent remedies—manna, magnesia, and camphor julep ; never put on a blister in his life ; and would sooner, from pure complaisance, let a patient die, than administer an unpalatable prescription.

So qualified, to say nothing of his gifts in tea-drinking, casino, and quadrille (whist was too many for him), his popularity could not be questioned. When he expired all Hazelby mourned. The lamentation was general. The women of every degree (to borrow a phrase from that great phrase-monger, Horace Walpole) “cried quarts ;” and the procession to the church-yard—that very church-yard to which he had himself followed so

many of his patients—was now attended by all of them that remained alive.

It was felt that the successor of Mr. Simon Shuter would have many difficulties to encounter. My friend, John Hallett, “came, and saw, and overcame.” John was what is usually called a rough diamond. Imagine a short, clumsy, stout-built figure, almost as broad as it is long, crowned by a bullet head, covered with shaggy brown hair, sticking out in every direction; the face round and solid, with a complexion originally fair, but dyed one red by exposure to all sorts of weather; open good-humoured eyes of a greenish cast, his admirers called them hazel; a wide mouth, full of large white teeth; a cocked-up nose, and a double chin; bearing altogether a strong resemblance to a print which I once saw hanging up in an alehouse parlour, of “the celebrated divine” (to use the identical words of the legend) “Doctor Martin Luther.”

The condition of a country apothecary being peculiarly liable to the inclemency of the season, John's dress was generally such as might bid defiance to wind or rain, or snow or hail. If any thing, he wrapt up most in the summer, having a theory that people were never so apt to take cold as in hot weather. He usually wore a bearskin great-coat, a silk handkerchief over his cravat, top boots on those sturdy pillars his legs, a huge pair of overalls, and a hat, which, from the day in which

it first came into his possession to that in which it was thrown aside, never knew the comfort of being freed from its oilskin—never was allowed to display the glossy freshness of its sable youth. Poor dear hat! how its vanity (if hats have vanity) must have suffered! For certain its owner had none, unless a lurking pride in his own bluffness and bluntness may be termed such. He piqued himself on being a plain downright Englishman, and on a voice and address pretty much like his apparel, rough, strong, and warm, and fit for all weathers. A heartier person never lived.

In his profession he was eminently skilful, bold, confident, and successful. The neighbouring physicians liked to come after Mr. Hallett; they were sure to find nothing to undo. And blunt and abrupt as was his general manner, he was kind and gentle in a sick-room; only nervous disorders, the pet diseases of Mr. Simon Shuter, he could not abide. He made short work with them; frightened them away, as one does by children when they have the hiccough; or if the malady were pertinacious and would not go, he fairly turned off the patient. Once or twice, indeed, on such occasions, the patient got the start, and turned him off; Mrs. Emery, for instance, the lady's maid at New Place, most delicate and mincing of waiting-gentlewomen, motioned him from her presence; and Miss Deane, daughter of Martha Deane, haberdasher, who, after completing her edu-

cation at a boarding-school, kept a closet full of millinery in a little den behind her mamma's shop, and was by many degrees the finest lady in Hazelby, was so provoked at being told by him that nothing ailed her, that, to prove her weakly condition, she pushed him by main force out of doors.

With these exceptions Mr. Hallett was the delight of the whole town, as well as of all the farm-houses within six miles round. He just suited the rich yeomanry; cured their diseases, and partook of their feasts; was constant at christenings, and a man of prime importance at weddings. A country merry-making was nothing without "the Doctor." He was "the very prince of good fellows;" had a touch of epicurism, which, without causing any distaste of his own homely fare, made dainties acceptable when they fell in his way; was a most absolute carver; prided himself upon a sauce of his own invention, for fish and game—"Hazelby sauce" he called it; and was universally admitted to be the best compounder of a bowl of punch in the country.

Besides these rare convivial accomplishments, his gay and jovial temper rendered him the life of the table. There was no resisting his droll faces, his droll stories, his jokes, his tricks, or his laugh—the most contagious cachination that ever was heard. Nothing in the shape of fun came amiss to him. He would join in a catch or roar out a solo, which might be heard a mile off; would play

at hunt the slipper, or blindman's-buff; was a great man in a country dance, and upon very extraordinary occasions would treat the company to a certain remarkable hornpipe, which put the walls in danger of tumbling about their ears, and belonged to him as exclusively as the Hazelby sauce. It was a sort of parody on a pas seul which he had once seen at the Opera-house, in which his face, his figure, his costume, his rich humour, and his strange, awkward, unexpected activity told amazingly. "The force of frolic could no farther go," than "the Doctor's hornpipe." It was the climax of jollity.

But the chief scene of Mr. Hallett's gaiety lay out of doors, in a very beautiful spot, called the Down, a sloping upland, about a mile from Hazelby; a side view of which, with its gardens and orchards, its pretty church peeping from amongst lime and yew trees, and the fine piece of water, called Hazelby Pond, it commanded. The Down itself was an extensive tract of land covered with the finest verdure, backed by a range of hills, and surrounded by coppice-woods, large patches of which were scattered over the turf, like so many islands on an emerald sea. Nothing could be more beautiful or more impenetrable than these thickets; they were principally composed of birch, holly, hawthorn, and maple, woven together by garlands of woodbine, interwreathed and intertwined by bramble and

briar, till even the sheep, although the bits of their snowy fleece left on the bushes bore witness to the attempt, could make no way in the leafy mass. Here and there a huge oak or beech rose towering above the rich underwood ; and all around, as far as the eye could pierce, the borders of this natural shrubbery were studded with a countless variety of woodland flowers. When the old thorns were in blossom, or when they were succeeded by the fragrant woodbine and the delicate briar-rose, it was like a garden, if it were possible to fancy any garden so peopled with birds *.

The only human habitation on this charming spot was the cottage of the shepherd, old Thomas Tolfrey, who, with his grand-daughter, Jemima, a light pretty maiden of fourteen, tended the flocks on the Down ; and the rustic carols of this little lass and the tinkling

* A circumstance of some curiosity in natural history occurred for several successive years on this down. There was constantly in one of the thickets a blackbird's nest, of which the young were distinguished by a striking peculiarity. The old birds (probably the same pair,) were of the usual sable colour, but the plumage of their progeny was milk-white, as white as a swan, without a single discoloured feather. They were always taken, and sold at high prices to the curious in such freaks of nature. The late bishop of Winchester had a pair of them for a long time in the aviary at Farnham Castle ; they were hardy, and the male was a fine song-bird ; but all attempts to breed from them failed. They died, " and left the world no copy."

of the sheep-bells were usually the only sounds that mingled with the sweet songs of the feathered tribes. On May-days and holidays, however, the thickets resounded with other notes of glee than those of the linnet and the wood-lark. Fairs, revels, May-games, and cricket-matches—all were holden on the Down; and there would John Hallet sit, in his glory, universal umpire and referee of cricketer, wrestler, or back-sword player, the happiest and greatest man in the field. Little Jemima never failed to bring her grandfather's arm-chair, and place it under the old oak for the good doctor; I question whether John would have exchanged his throne for that of the King of England.

On these occasions he certainly would have been the better for that convenience, which he piqued himself on not needing—a partner. Generally speaking, he really, as he used to boast, did the business of three men; but when a sickly season and a Maying happened to come together, I cannot help suspecting that the patients had the worst of it. Perhaps, however, a partner might not have suited him. He was sturdy and independent to the verge of a fault, and would not have brooked being called to account, or brought to a reckoning by any man under the sun; still less would he endure the thought of that more important and durable co-partnery—marriage. He was a most determined bachelor; and so afraid of being mistaken for a

wooer, or incurring the reputation of a gay deceiver, that he was as uncivil as his good-nature would permit to every unwedded female from sixteen to sixty, and had nearly fallen into some scrapes on that account with the spinsters of the town, accustomed to the soft silkiness of Mr. Simon Shuter; but they got used to it—it was the man's way; and there was an indirect flattery in his fear of their charms which the maiden ladies, especially the elder ones, found very mollifying; so he was forgiven.

In his shop and his household he had no need either of partner or of wife: the one was excellently managed by an old rheumatic journeyman, slow in speech and of vinegar aspect, who had been a pedagogue in his youth, and now used to limp about with his *Livy* in his pocket, and growl as he compounded the medicines over the bad latinity of the prescriptions; the other was equally well conducted by an equally ancient housekeeper and a cherry-cheeked niece, the orphan daughter of his only sister, who kept every thing within doors in the bright and shining order in which he delighted. John Hallett, notwithstanding the roughness of his aspect, was rather knick-knacky in his tastes; a great patron of small inventions, such as the improved *ne plus ultra* cork-screw, and the latest patent snuffers. He also trifled with horticulture, dabbled in tulips, was a connoisseur in pinks, and had gained a prize for polyan-

thuses. The garden was under the especial care of his pretty niece, Miss Margaret, a grateful, warm-hearted girl, who thought she never could do enough to please her good uncle, and prove her sense of his kindness. He was indeed as fond of her as if he had been her father, and as kind.

Perhaps there was nothing very extraordinary in his goodness to the gentle and cheerful little girl who kept his walks so trim and his parlour so neat, who always met him with a smile, and who (last and strongest tie to a generous mind,) was wholly dependant on him—had no friend on earth but himself. There was nothing very uncommon in that. But John Hallet was kind to every one, even where the sturdy old English prejudices, which he cherished as virtues, might seem most likely to counteract his gentler feelings. One instance of his benevolence and of his delicacy shall conclude this sketch.

Several years ago an old French emigré came to reside at Hazelby. He lodged at Matthew Wise's, of whose twofold shop for cakes and novels I have before made honourable mention, in the low three-cornered room, with a closet behind it, which Matthew had the impudence to call his first floor. Little was known of him but that he was a thin, pale, foreign-looking gentleman, who shrugged his shoulders in speaking, took a great deal of snuff, and made a remarkably low bow. The few persons with whom he had any communication

spoke with amusement of his bad English, and with admiration of his good humour, and it soon appeared, from a written paper placed in a conspicuous part of Matthew's shop, that he was an Abbé, and that he would do himself the honour of teaching French to any of the nobility or gentry of Hazelby who might think fit to employ him. Pupils dropt in rather slowly. The curate's daughters, and the attorney's son, and Miss Deane the milliner—but she found the language difficult, and left off, asserting that M. l'Abbé's snuff made her nervous. At last poor M. l'Abbé fell ill himself, really ill, dangerously ill, and Matthew Wise went in all haste to summon Mr. Hallett. Now Mr. Hallett had such an aversion to a Frenchman, in general, as a cat has to a dog; and was wont to erect himself into an attitude of defiance and wrath at the mere sight of the object of his antipathy. He hated and despised the whole nation, abhorred the language, and “would as lief,” he assured Matthew, “have been called in to a toad.” He went, however, grew interested in the case, which was difficult and complicated; exerted all his skill, and in about a month accomplished a cure.

By this time he had also become interested in his patient, whose piety, meekness, and resignation, had won upon him in an extraordinary degree. The disease was gone, but a languor and lowness remained, which Mr. Hallett soon traced to a less curable disorder, pe-

verty : the thought of the debt to himself evidently weighed on the poor Abbé's spirits, and our good apothecary at last determined to learn French purely to liquidate his own long bill. It was the drollest thing in the world to see this pupil of fifty, whose habits were so entirely unfitted for a learner, conning his task ; or to hear him conjugating the verb avoir, or blundering through the first phrases of the easy dialogues. He was a most unpromising scholar, shuffled the syllables together in a manner that would seem incredible, and stumbled at every step of the pronunciation, against which his English tongue rebelled amain. Every now and then he solaced himself with a fluent volley of execrations in his own language, which the Abbé understood well enough to return, after rather a politer fashion, in French. It was a most amusing scene. But the motive ! the generous, noble motive ! M. l'Abbé, after a few lessons, detected this delicate artifice, and, touched almost to tears, insisted on dismissing his pupil, who, on his side, declared that nothing should induce him to abandon his studies. At last they came to a compromise. The cherry-cheeked Margaret took her uncle's post as a learner, which she filled in a manner much more satisfactory ; and the good old Frenchman not only allowed Mr. Hallet to administer gratis to his ailments, but partook of his Sunday dinner as long as he lived.

WHEAT-HOEING.

A MORNING RAMBLE.

MAY the 3d.—Cold bright weather. All within doors, sunny and chilly ; all without, windy and dusty. It is quite tantalizing to see that brilliant sun careering through so beautiful a sky, and to feel little more warmth from his presence than one does from that of his fair but cold sister, the moon. Even the sky, beautiful as it is, has the look of that one sometimes sees in a very bright moonlight night—deeply, intensely blue, with white fleecy clouds driven vigorously along by a strong breeze —now veiling and now exposing the dazzling luminary around whom they sail. A beautiful sky ! and, in spite of its coldness, a beautiful world ! The effect of this backward spring has been to arrest the early flowers, to which heat is the great enemy ; whilst the leaves and the later flowers have, nevertheless, ventured to peep out slowly and cautiously in sunny places—exhibiting, in the copses and hedge-rows, a pleasant mixture of March and May. And we, poor chilly mortals, must follow, as nearly as we can, the wise example of the

May-blossoms, by avoiding bleak paths and open commons, and creeping up the sheltered road to the vicarage—the pleasant sheltered road, where the western sun steals in between two rows of bright green elms, and the east wind is fenced off by the range of woody hills which rise abruptly before us, forming so striking a boundary to the picture.

How pretty this lane is, with its tall elms, just drest in their young leaves, bordering the sunny path, or sweeping in a semi-circle behind the clear pools, and the white cottages that are scattered along the way. You shall seldom see a cottage hereabout without an accompanying pond, all alive with geese and ducks, at the end of the little garden. Ah! here is Dame Simmons making a most original use of her piece of water, standing on the bank that divides it from her garden, and most ingeniously watering her onion-bed with a new mop—now a dip, and now a twirl! Really, I give her credit for the invention. It is as good an imitation of a shower as one should wish to see on a summer-day. A squirt is nothing to it!

And here is another break to the tall line of elms—the gate that leads into Farmer Thorpe's great enclosures. Eight, ten, fourteen people in this large field, wheat-hoeing. The couple nearest the gate, who keep aloof from all the rest, and are hoeing this furrow so completely in concert, step by step and stroke for stroke,

are Jem Tanner and Mabel Green. There is not a handsomer pair in the field or in the village. Jem, with his bright complexion, his curling hair, his clear blue eye, and his trim figure—set off to great advantage by his short jacket and trowsers and new straw hat ; Mabel, with her little stuff gown, and her white handkerchief and apron—defining so exactly her light and flexible shape—and her black eyes flashing from under a deep bonnet lined with pink, whose reflection gives to her bright dark countenance and dimpled cheeks a glow innocently artificial, which was the only charm that they wanted.

Jem and Mabel are, beyond all doubt, the handsomest couple in the field, and I am much mistaken if each have not a vivid sense of the charms of the other. Their mutual admiration was clear enough in their work ; but it speaks still more plainly in their idleness. Not a stroke have they done for these five minutes ; Jem, propped on his hoe, and leaning across the furrow, whispering soft nonsense ; Mabel, blushing and smiling —now making believe to turn away—now listening, and looking up with a sweeter smile than ever, and a blush that makes her bonnet-lining pale. Ah, Mabel ! Mabel ! Now they are going to work again ;—no !—after three or four strokes, the hoes have somehow become entangled, and, without either advancing a step nearer the other, they are playing with these rustic im-

plements as pretty a game at romps—shewing off as nice a piece of rural flirtation—as ever was exhibited since wheat was hoed.

Ah, Mabel! Mabel! beware of Farmer Thorpe! He'll see, at a glance, that little will his corn profit by such labours. Beware, too, Jem Tanner!—for Mabel is, in some sort, an heiress: being the real niece and adopted daughter of our little lame clerk, who, although he looks such a tattered raggamuffin, that the very grave-diggers are ashamed of him, is well to pass in the world—keeps a scrub pony,—indeed he can hardly walk up the aisle—hath a share in the County fire-office—and money in the funds. Mabel will be an heiress, despite the tatterdemallion costume of her honoured uncle, which I think he wears out of coquetry, that the remarks which might otherwise fall on his miserable person—full as misshapen as that of any Hunch-back recorded in the Arabian Tales—may find a less offensive vent on his raiment. Certain such a figure hath seldom been beheld out of church or in. Yet will Mabel, nevertheless, be a fortune; and, therefore, she must intermarry with another fortune, according to the rule made and provided in such cases; and the little clerk hath already looked her out a spouse, about his own standing—a widower in the next parish, with four children and a squint. Poor Jem Tanner! Nothing will that smart person or that pleasant speech avail with

the little clerk ;—never will he officiate at your marriage to his niece ;—“ amen” would “ stick in his throat.” Poor things ! in what a happy oblivion of the world and its cares, Farmer Thorpe and the wheat-hoeing, the squinting shop-keeper and the little clerk, are they laughing and talking at this moment ! Poor things ! poor things !

Well, I must pursue my walk. How beautiful a mixture of flowers and leaves is in the high bank under this north hedge—quite an illustration of the blended seasons of which I spoke. An old irregular hedge-row is always beautiful, especially in the spring-time, when the grass, and mosses, and flowering weeds mingle best with the bushes and creeping plants that overhang them. But this bank is, most especially, various and lovely. Shall we try to analyze it ? First, the clinging white-veined ivy, which crawls up the slope in every direction, the master-piece of that rich mosaic ; then the brown leaves and the lilac blossoms of its fragrant namesake, the ground-ivy, which grows here so profusely ; then the late-lingering primrose ; then the delicate wood-sorrel ; then the regular pink stars of the cranesbill, with its beautiful leaves ; then the golden oxslip and the cowslip, “ cinque-spotted ;” then the blue pansy, and the enamelled wild hyacinth ; then the bright foliage of the briar-rose, which comes trailing its green wreaths amongst the flowers ; then the bramble and the

woodbine, creeping round the foot of a pollard oak, with its brown folded leaves; then a verdant mass—the blackthorn, with its lingering blossoms—the hawthorn, with its swelling buds—the bushy maple—the long stems of the hazel—and between them, hanging like a golden plume over the bank, a splendid tuft of the blossomed broom; then, towering high above all, the tall and leafy elms. And this is but a faint picture of this hedge, on the meadowy side of which sheep are bleating, and where, every here and there, a young lamb is thrusting its pretty head between the trees.

Who is this approaching? Farmer Thorpe? Yes, of a certainty, it is that substantial yeoman, sallying forth from his substantial farm-house, which peeps out front between two huge walnut-trees on the other side of the road, with intent to survey his labourers in the wheat-field. Farmer Thorpe is a stout, square, sturdy personage of fifty, or thereabout, with a hard weather-beaten countenance, of that peculiar vermillion, all over alike, into which the action of the sun and wind sometimes tans a fair complexion; sharp shrewd features, and a keen grey eye. He looks completely like a man who will neither cheat nor be cheated: and such is his character—an upright, downright English yeoman—just always, and kind in a rough way—but given to fits of anger, and filled with an abhorrence of pilfering, and idleness, and trickery of all sorts, that makes him strict

as a master, and somewhat stern at workhouse and vestry. I doubt if he will greatly relish the mode in which Jem and Mabel are administering the hoe in his wheat-drills. He will not reach the gate yet ; for his usual steady active pace is turned, by a recent accident, into an unequal, impatient halt—as if he were alike angry with his lameness and the cause. I must speak to him as he passes—not merely as a due courtesy to a good neighbour, but to give the delinquents in the field notice to resume their hoeing ; but not a word of the limp—that is a sore subject.

“ A fine day, Mr. Thorpe !”

“ We want rain, ma’am !”

And on, with great civility, but without pausing a moment, he is gone. He’ll certainly catch Mabel and her lover philandering over his wheat-furrows. Well, that may take its chance!—they have his lameness in their favour—only that the cause of that lameness has made the worthy farmer unusually cross. I think I must confide the story to my readers.

Gipsies and beggars do not in general much inhabit our neighbourhood ; but, about half a mile off, there is a den so convenient for strollers and vagabonds, that it sometimes tempts the rogues to a few days’ sojourn. It is, in truth, nothing more than a deserted brick-kiln, by the side of a lonely lane. But there is something so snug and comfortable in the old building (always keep-

ing in view gipsy notions of comfort); the blackened walls are so backed by the steep hill on whose side they are built—so fenced from the bleak north-east, and letting in so gaily the pleasant western sun ; and the wide rugged impassable lane (used only as a road to the kiln, and with that abandoned) is at once so solitary and deserted, and so close to the inhabited and populous world, that it seems made for a tribe whose prime requisites in a habitation are shelter, privacy, and a vicinity to farm-yards.

Accordingly, about a month ago, a pretty strong encampment, evidently gipsies, took up their abode in the kiln. The party consisted of two or three tall, lean, sinister-looking men, who went about the country mending pots and kettles, and driving a small trade in old iron ; one or two children, unnaturally quiet, the spies of the crew ; an old woman, who sold matches and told fortunes ; a young woman, with an infant strapped to her back, who begged ; several hungry-looking dogs, and three ragged donkeys. The arrival of these vagabonds spread a general consternation through the village. Gamekeepers and housewives were in equal dismay. Snares were found in the preserves—poultry vanished from the farm-yards—a lamb was lost from the lea—and a damask table-cloth, belonging to the worshipful the Mayor of W——, was abstracted from the drying-ground of Rachel Strong, the most celebrated laundress in these

parts, to whom it had been sent for the benefit of country washing. No end to the pilfering, and the stories of pilfering ! The inhabitants of the kiln were not only thieves in themselves, but the cause of thievery in others. "The gipsies !" was the answer general to every inquiry for things missing.

Farmer Thorpe—whose dwelling, with its variety of outbuildings—barns, ricks, and stables—is only separated by a meadow and a small coppice from the lane that leads to the gipsy retreat—was particularly annoyed by this visitation. Two couple of full-grown ducks, and a whole brood of early chickens, disappeared in one night ; and Mrs. Thorpe fretted over the loss, and the farmer was indignant at the robbery. He set traps, let loose mastiffs, and put in action all the resources of village police—but in vain. Every night property went ; and the culprits, however strongly suspected, still continued unamenable to the law.

At last, one morning, the great Chanticleer of the farm-yard—a cock of a million, with an unrivalled crow—a matchless strut, and plumage all gold and green, and orange and purple—gorgeous as a peacock, and fierce as a he-turkey—Chanticleer, the pride and glory of the yard, was missing ! and Mrs. Thorpe's lamentations and her husband's anger redoubled. Vowing vengeance against the gipsies, he went to the door to survey a young blood mare of his own breeding ; and as

he stood at the gate—now bemoaning Chanticleer—now cursing the gipsies—now admiring the bay filly—his neighbour, Dame Simmons—the identical lady of the mop, who occasionally chared at the house—came to give him the comfortable information that she had certainly heard Chanticleer—she was quite ready to swear to Chanticleer's voice—crowing in the brick-kiln. No time, she added, should be lost, if Farmer Thorpe wished to rescue that illustrious cock, and to punish the culprits—since the gipsies, when she passed the place, were preparing to decamp.

No time was lost. In one moment Farmer Thorpe was on the bay filly's unsaddled back, with the halter for a bridle; and, in the next, they were on full gallop towards the kiln. But, alas! alas! “the more haste the worse speed,” says the wisdom of nations. Just as they arrived at the spot from which the procession—gipsies, dogs, and donkeys—and Chanticleer in a sack, shrieking most vigorously—were proceeding on their travels, the young blood mare—whether startled at the unusual *cortége*, or the rough ways, or the hideous noise of her old friend, the cock—suddenly reared and threw her master, who lay in all the agony of a sprained ankle, unable to rise from the ground; whilst the whole tribe, with poor Chanticleer their prisoner, marched triumphantly past him, utterly regardless of his threats and imprecations. In this plight was the unlucky farmer

discovered, about half an hour afterwards, by his wife, the constable, and a party of his own labourers, who came to give him assistance in securing the culprits ; of whom, notwithstanding an instant and active search through the neighbourhood, nothing has yet transpired. We shall hardly see them again in these parts, and have almost done talking of them. The village is returned to its old state of order and honesty ; the Mayor of W—— has replaced his table-cloth, and Mrs. Thorpe her cock ; and the poor farmer's lame ankle is all that remains to give token of the gipsies.

Here we are at the turning, which, edging round by the coppice, branches off to their some-time den : the other bend to the right leads up a gentle ascent to the vicarage, and that is our way. How fine a view of the little parsonage we have from hence, between those arching elms, which enclose it like a picture in a frame ! and how pretty a picture it forms, with its three pointed roofs, its snug porch, and its casement windows glittering from amid the china-roses ! What a nest of peace and comfort ! Farther on, almost at the summit of the hill, stands the old church with its massy tower—a row of superb lime-trees running along one side of the church-yard, and a cluster of dark yews shading the other. Few country churches have so much to boast in architectural beauty, or in grandeur of situation.

We lose sight of it as we mount the hill, the lane nar-

rowing and winding between deep banks, surmounted by high hedges, excluding all prospects till we reach the front of the vicarage, and catch across the gate of the opposite field a burst of country the most extensive and the most beautiful—field and village, mansion and cot, town and river, all smiling under the sparkling sun of May, and united and harmonized by the profusion of hedgerow timber in its freshest verdure, giving a rich woodland character to the scene, till it is terminated in the distance by the blue line of the Hampshire hills almost melting into the horizon. Such is the view from the vicarage. But it is too sunny and too windy to stand about out of doors, and time to finish our ramble. Down the hill, and round the corner, and past Farmer Thorpe's house, and one glance at the wheat-hoers, and then we will go home.

Ah ! it is just as I feared. Jem and Mabel have been parted : they are now at opposite sides of the fields—he looking very angry, working rapidly and violently, and doing more harm than good—she looking tolerably sulky, and just moving her hoe, but evidently doing nothing at all. Farmer Thorpe, on his part, is standing in the middle of the field, observing, but pretending not to observe, the little humours of the separated lovers. There is a lurking smile about the corners of his mouth that bespeaks him more amused than angry. He is a kind person after all, and will certainly make no mischief. I

should not even wonder if he espoused Jem Tanner's cause ; and, for certain, if any one can prevail on the little clerk to give up his squinting favourite in favour of true love, Farmer Thorpe is the man.

THE VILLAGE SCHOOLMISTRESS.

WOMEN, fortunately perhaps for their happiness and their virtue, have, as compared with men, so few opportunities of acquiring permanent distinction, that it is rare to find a female unconnected with literature or with history, whose name is remembered after her monument is defaced, and the brass on her coffin-lid corroded. Such, however, was the case with Dame Eleanor, the widow of Sir Richard Lacy, whose name, at the end of three centuries, continued to be as freshly and as frequently spoken, as "familiar," a "household word" in the little village of Aberleigh, as if she had flourished there yesterday. Her memory was embalmed by a deed of charity and of goodness. She had founded and endowed a girls' school for "the instruction" (to use the words of the deed) "of twenty poor children, and the maintenance of one discreet and godly matron;" and the school still continued to be called after its foundress, and the very spot on which the school-house stood, to be known by the name of Lady Lacy's Green.

It was a spot worthy of its destination,—a spot of remarkable cheerfulness and beauty. The Green was small, of irregular shape, and situate at a confluence of shady lanes. Half the roads and paths of the parish met there, probably for the convenience of crossing, in that place by a stone bridge of one arch covered with ivy, the winding rivulet which intersected the whole village, and which, sweeping in a narrow channel round the school garden widened into a stream of some consequence, in the richly-wooded meadows beyond. The banks of the brook, as it wound its glittering course over the green, were set, here and there, with clumps of forest trees, chiefly bright green elms, and aspens with their quivering leaves and their pale shining bark; whilst a magnificent beech stood alone near the gate leading to the school, partly overshadowing the little court in which the house was placed. The building itself was a beautiful small structure, in the ornamented style of Elizabeth's day, with pointed roofs and pinnacles, and clustered chimnies, and casement windows; the whole house enwreathed and garlanded by a most luxuriant vine. The date of the erection, 1563, was cut in a stone inserted in the brick-work above the porch: but the founder had, with an unostentatious modesty, withheld her name; leaving it, as she safely might, to the grateful recollection of the successive generations who profited by her benevolence. Altogether it was a

most gratifying scene to the eye and to the heart. No one ever saw Lady Lacy's school-house without admiration, especially in the play-hour at noon, when the children, freed from " restraint that sweetens liberty," were clustered under the old beech-tree, revelling in their innocent freedom, running, jumping, shouting, and laughing with all their might; the only sort of riot which it is pleasant to witness. The painter and the philanthropist might contemplate that scene with equal delight.

The right of appointing both the mistress and the scholars had been originally vested in the Lacy family, to whom nearly the whole of the parish had at one time belonged. But the estates, the manor, the hall-house had long passed into other hands and other names, and this privilege of charity was now the only possession which the heirs of Lady Lacy retained in Aberleigh. Reserving to themselves the right of nominating the matron, her descendants had therefore delegated to the vicar and the parish officers the selection of the children, and the general regulation of the school—a sort of council of regency, which, for as simple and as peaceful as the government seems, a disputatious churchwarden or a sturdy overseer would sometimes contrive to render sufficiently stormy. I have known as much canvassing and almost as much ill-will in a contested election for one of Lady Lacy's scholarships, as for a scholarship in

grander places, or even for an M. P.-ship in the next borough ; and the great schism between the late Farmer Brookes and all his coadjutors, as to whether the original uniform of little green stuff gowns, with white bibs and aprons, tippets and mob, should be commuted for modern cotton frocks and cottage bonnets, fairly set the parish by the ears. Owing to the good farmer's glorious obstinacy (which I suppose he called firmness), the green-gownians lost the day. I believe that, as a matter of calculation, the man might be right, and that his costume was cheaper and more convenient ; but I am sure that I should have been against him, right or wrong : the other dress was so pretty, so primitive, so neat, so becoming ; the little lasses looked like rose buds in the midst of their leaves : besides, it was the old traditionary dress—the dress contrived and approved by Lady Lacy. Oh ! it should never have been changed, never !

Since there was so much contention in the election of pupils, it was perhaps lucky for the vestry that the exercise of the more splendid piece of patronage, the appointment of a mistress, did not enter into its duties. Mr. Lacy, the representative of the foundress, a man of fortune in a distant county, generally bestowed the situation on some old dependant of his family. During the churchwardenship of Farmer Brookes, no less than three village gouvernantes arrived at Aberleigh — a quick suc-

cession ! It made more than half the business of our zealous and bustling man of office, an amateur in such matters, to instruct and overlook them. The first importation was Dame Whitaker, a person of no small importance, who had presided as head nurse over two generations of the Lacy's, and was now, on the dispersion of the last set of her nurslings to their different schools, and an unlucky quarrel with a favourite lady's maid, promoted and banished to this distant government. Nobody could well be more unfit for her new station, or better suited to her old. She was a nurse from top to toe. Round, portly, smiling, with a coaxing voice, and an indolent manner ; much addicted to snuff and green tea, to sitting still, to telling long stories, and to humouring children. She spoiled every brat she came near, just as she had been used to spoil the little Master Edwards and Miss Julias of her ancient dominions. She could not have scolded if she would—the gift was not in her. Under her misrule the school grew into sad disorder ; the girls not only learnt nothing, but unlearnt what they knew before ; work was lost—even the new shifts of the Vicar's lady ; books were torn ; and, for the climax of evil, no sampler was prepared to carry round at Christmas, from house to house—the first time such an omission had occurred within the memory of man. Farmer Brookes was at his wit's end. He visited the school six days in the week, to admonish and re-

prove ; he even went nigh to threaten that he would work a sampler himself ; and finally bestowed on the unfortunate ex-nurse, the nickname of Queen Log, a piece of disrespect, which, together with other grievances, proved so annoying to poor Dame Whitaker, that she found the air of Aberleigh disagree with her, patched up a peace with her old enemy, the lady's maid, abdicated that unruly and rebellious principality, the school, and retired with great delight to her quiet home in the deserted nursery, where, as far as I know, she still remains.

The grief of the children on losing this most indulgent non-instructress, was not mitigated by the appearance or demeanour of her successor, who at first seemed a preceptress after Farmer Brookes's own heart, a perfect Queen Stork. Dame Banks was the widow of Mr. Lacy's gamekeeper ; a little thin woman, with a hooked nose, a sharp voice, and a prodigious activity of tongue. She scolded all day long ; and, for the first week, passed for a great teacher. After that time it began to be discovered, that, in spite of her lessons, the children did not learn ; notwithstanding her rating they did not mind, and in the midst of a continual bustle nothing was ever done. Dame Banks was in fact a well-intentioned, worthy woman, with a restless irritable temper, a strong desire to do her duty, and a woeful ignorance how to set about it. She was rather too old to be

taught either; at least she required a gentler instructor than the good churchwarden; and so much ill-will was springing up between them, that he had even been heard to regret the loss of Dame Whitaker's quietness, when very suddenly poor Dame Banks fell ill, and died. The sword had worn the scabbard; but she was better than she seemed; a thoroughly well-meaning woman—grateful, pious, and charitable; even our man of office admitted this.

The next in succession was one with whom my trifling pen, dearly as that light and fluttering instrument loves to dally and disport over the surfaces of things, must take no saucy freedom; one of whom we all felt it impossible to speak or to think without respect; one who made Farmer Brookes's office of adviser a sinecure, by putting the whole school, himself included, into its proper place, setting every body in order, and keeping them so. I don't know how she managed, unless by good sense and good humour, and that happy art of government, which seems no art at all, because it is so perfect; but the children were busy and happy, the vestry pleased, and the churchwarden contented. All went well under Mrs. Allen.

She was an elderly woman, nearer perhaps to seventy than to sixty, and of an exceedingly venerable and prepossessing appearance. Delicacy was her chief characteristic—a delicacy so complete that it pervaded her

whole person, from her tall, slender figure, her fair, faded complexion, and her silver hair, to the exquisite nicety of dress by which, at all hours and seasons, from Sunday morning to Saturday night, she was invariably distinguished. The soil of the day was never seen on her apparel ; dust would not cling to her snowy caps and handkerchiefs : such was the art magic of her neatness. Her very pins did their office in a different manner from those belonging to other people. Her manner was gentle, cheerful, and courteous, with a simplicity and propriety of expression that perplexed all listeners ; it seemed so exactly what belongs to the highest birth and the highest breeding. She was humble, very humble ; but her humility was evidently the result of a truly Christian spirit, and would equally have distinguished her in any station. The poor people, always nice judges of behaviour, felt, they did not know why, that she was their superior ; the gentry of the neighbourhood suspected her to be their equal—some clergyman's or officer's widow, reduced in circumstances ; and would have treated her as such, had she not, on discovering their mistake, eagerly undeceived them. She had been, she said, all her life a servant, the personal attendant of one dear mistress, on whose decease she had been recommended to Mr. Lacy ; and to his kindness, under Providence, was indebted for a home and a provision for her helpless age, and the still more helpless youth

of a poor orphan, far dearer to her than herself. This avowal, although it changed the character of the respect paid to Mrs. Allen, was certainly not calculated to diminish its amount ; and the new mistress of Lady Lacy's school, and the beautiful order of her house and garden, continued to be the pride and admiration of Aberleigh.

The orphan of whom she spoke was a little girl about eleven years old, who lived with her, and whose black frock bespoke the recent death of some relative. She had lately, Mrs. Allen said, lost her grandmother—her only remaining parent, and had now no friend but herself on earth ; but there was one above who was a Father to the fatherless, and he would protect poor Jane ! And as she said this, there was a touch of emotion, a break of the voice, a tremor on the lip, very unlike the usual cheerfulness and self-command of her manner. The child was evidently very dear to her. Jane was, indeed, a most interesting creature : not pretty—a girl of that age seldom is ; the beauty of childhood is outgrown, that of youth not come ; and Jane could scarcely ever have had any other pretensions to prettiness, than the fine expression of her dark grey eyes, and the general sweetness of her countenance. She was pale, thin, and delicate ; serious and thoughtful far beyond her years ; averse from play, and shrinking from notice. Her fondness for Mrs. Allen, and her constant and unremitting

attention to her health and comforts, were peculiarly remarkable. Every part of their small housewifery, that her height and strength and skill would enable her to perform, she insisted on doing, and many things far beyond her power she attempted. Never was so industrious or so handy a little maiden. Old Nelly Chun, the char-woman, who went once a week to the house, to wash and bake and scour, declared that Jane did more than herself; and to all who knew Nelly's opinion of her own doings, this praise appeared superlative.

In the school-room she was equally assiduous, not as a learner, but as a teacher. None so clever as Jane in superintending the different exercises of the needle, the spelling-book, and the slate. From the little work-woman's first attempt to insert thread into a pocket handkerchief, that digging and ploughing of cambric, miscalled hemming, up to the nice and delicate mysteries of stitching and button-holing; from the easy junction of *a b, ab, and b a, ba*, to that tremendous sesquipedalian word *irrefragability*, at which even I tremble as I write; from the Numeration Table to Practice, nothing came amiss to her. In figures she was particularly quick. Generally speaking, her patience with the other children, however dull or tiresome or giddy they might be, was exemplary; but a false accomptant, a stupid arithmetician, would put her out of humour. The only time I ever heard her sweet, gentle voice raised a note above

its natural key, was in reprimanding Susan Wheeler, a sturdy, square-made, rosy-cheeked lass, as big again as herself, the dunce and beauty of the school, who had three times cast up a sum of three figures, and three times made the total wrong. Jane ought to have admired the ingenuity evinced by such a variety of error; but she did not; it fairly put her in a passion. She herself was not only clever in figures, but fond of them to an extraordinary degree—luxuriated in Long Division, and revelled in the Rule-of-Three. Had she been a boy, she would probably have been a great mathematician, and have won that fickle, fleeting, shadowy wreath, that crown made of the rainbow, that vainest of all earthly pleasures, but which yet *is* a pleasure—Fame.

Happier, far happier was the good, the lowly, the pious child, in her humble duties! Grave and quiet as she seemed, she had many moments of intense and placid enjoyment, when the duties of the day were over, and she sate reading in the porch, by the side of Mrs. Allen, or walked with her in the meadows on a Sunday evening after church. Jane was certainly contented and happy; and yet every one that saw her, thought of her with that kind of interest which is akin to pity. There was a pale, fragile grace about her, such as we sometimes see in a rose which has blown in the shade; or rather, to change the simile, the drooping and delicate look of a tender plant removed from a hothouse to the open air. We

could not help feeling sure (notwithstanding our mistake with regard to Mrs. Allen) that *this* was indeed a transplanted flower ; and that the village school, however excellently her habits had become inured to her situation, was not her proper atmosphere.

Several circumstances corroborated our suspicions. My lively young friend Sophia Grey, standing with me one day at the gate of the school-house, where I had been talking with Mrs. Allen, remarked to me, in French, the sly, demure vanity, with which Susan Wheeler, whose beauty had attracted her attention, was observing and returning her glances. The playful manner in which Sophia described Susan's "regard furtif," made me smile ; and looking accidentally at Jane, I saw that she was smiling too, clearly comprehending, and enjoying the full force of the pleasantry. She must understand French ; and when questioned, she confessed she did, and thankfully accepted the loan of books in that language. Another time, being sent on a message to the vicarage, and left for some minutes alone in the parlour, with a piano standing open in the room, she could not resist the temptation of touching the keys, and was discovered playing an air of Mozart, with great taste and execution. At this detection she blushed, as if caught in a crime, and hurried away in tears and without her message. It was clear that she had once learnt music. But the surest proof that Jane's original station had been higher

than that which she now filled, was the mixture of respect and fondness with which Mrs. Allen treated her, and the deep regret she sometimes testified at seeing her employed in any menial office.

At last, elicited by some warm praise of the charming child, our good schoolmistress disclosed her story. Jane Mowbray was the grand-daughter of the lady in whose service Mrs. Allen had passed her life. Her father had been a man of high family and splendid fortune; had married beneath himself, as it was called, a friendless orphan, with no portion but beauty and virtue; and, on her death, which followed shortly on the birth of her daughter, had plunged into every kind of vice and extravagance. What need to tell a tale of sin and suffering? Mr. Mowbray had ruined himself, had ruined all belonging to him, and finally had joined our armies abroad as a volunteer, and had fallen undistinguished in his first battle. The news of his death was fatal to his indulgent mother; and when she too died, Mrs. Allen blessed the Providence which, by throwing in her way a recommendation to Lady Lacy's school, had enabled her to support the dear object of her mistress's love and prayers. "Had Miss Mowbray no connexions?" was the natural question. "Yes; one very near,—an aunt, the sister of her father, richly married in India. But Sir William was a proud, and a stern man, upright in his own conduct, and implacable to error. Lady Ely was a sweet,

gentle creature, and doubtless would be glad to extend a mother's protection to the orphan ; but Sir William—Oh ! he was so unrelenting ! He had abjured Mr. Mowbray, and all connected with him. She had written to inform them where the dear child was, but had no expectation of any answer from India."

Time verified this prediction. The only tidings from India, at all interesting to Jane Mowbray, were contained in the paragraph of a newspaper which announced Lady Ely's death, and put an end to all hopes of protection in that quarter. Years passed on, and found her still with Mrs. Allen at Lady Lacy's Green, more and more beloved and respected from day to day. She had now attained almost to womanhood. Strangers, I believe, called her plain ; we, who knew her, thought her pretty. Her figure was tall and straight as a cypress, pliant and flexible as a willow, full of gentle grace, whether in repose or in motion. She had a profusion of light brown hair, a pale complexion, dark grey eyes, a smile of which the character was rather sweet than gay, and such a countenance ! no one could look at her without wishing her well, or without being sure that she deserved all good wishes. Her manners were modest and elegant, and she had much of the self-taught knowledge, which is, of all knowledge, the surest and the best, because acquired with most difficulty, and fixed in the memory by the repetition of effort. Every one had

assisted her to the extent of his power, and of her willingness to accept assistance; for both she and Mrs. Allen had a pride—call it independence—which rendered it impossible, even to the friends who were most honoured by their good opinion, to be as useful to them as they could have wished. To give Miss Mowbray time for improvement had, however, proved a powerful emollient to the pride of our dear schoolmistress; and that time had been so well employed, that her acquirements were considerable; whilst in mind and character she was truly admirable; mild, grateful, and affectionate, and imbued with a deep religious feeling, which influenced every action and pervaded every thought. So gifted, she was deemed by her constant friends, the vicar and his lady, perfectly competent to the care and education of children; it was agreed that she should enter a neighbouring family, as a successor to their then governess, early in the ensuing spring; and she, although sad at the prospect of leaving her aged protectress, acquiesced in their decision.

One fine Sunday in the October preceding this dreaded separation, as Miss Mowbray, with Mrs. Allen leaning on her arm, was slowly following the little train of Lady Lacy's scholars from church, an elderly gentleman, sickly-looking and emaciated, accosted a pretty young woman, who was loitering with some other girls at the church-yard gate, and asked her several questions re-

specting the school and its mistress. Susan Wheeler (for it happened to be our old acquaintance) was delighted to be singled out by so grand a gentleman, and being a kind-hearted creature in the main, spoke of the school-house and its inhabitants exactly as they deserved. "Mrs. Allen," she said, "was the best woman in the world—the very best, except just Miss Mowbray, who was better still,—only too particular about summing, which you know, Sir," added Susan, "people can't learn if they can't. She is going to be a governess in the spring," continued the loquacious damsels; "and it's to be hoped the little ladies will take kindly to their tables, or it will be a sad grievance to Miss Jane."—"A governess! Where can I make enquiries concerning Miss Mowbray?"—"At the vicarage, Sir," answered Susan, dropping her little courtesy, and turning away, well pleased with the gentleman's condescension, and with half-a-crown which he had given her in return for her intelligence. The stranger, meanwhile, walked straight to the vicarage: and in less than half an hour the vicar repaired with him to Lady Lacy's Green.

This stranger, so drooping, so sickly, so emaciated, was the proud Indian uncle, the stern Sir William Ely! Sickness and death had been busy with him and with his. He had lost his health, his wife, and his children; and, softened by affliction, was returned to England a new man, anxious to forgive and to be forgiven, and,

above all, desirous to repair his neglect and injustice toward the only remaining relative of the wife whom he had so fondly loved and so tenderly lamented. In this frame of mind, such a niece as Jane Mowbray was welcomed with no common joy. His delight in her, and his gratitude toward her protectress, were unbounded. He wished them both to accompany him home, and reside with him constantly. Jane promised to do so; but Mrs. Allen, with her usual admirable feeling of propriety, clung to the spot which had been to her a "city of refuge," and refused to leave it in spite of all the entreaties of uncle and of niece. It was a happy decision for Aberleigh; for what could Aberleigh have done without its good schoolmistress?

She lives there still, its ornament and its pride; and every year Jane Mowbray comes for a long visit, and makes a holiday in the school and in the whole place. Jane Mowbray, did I say? No! not Jane Mowbray now. She has changed that dear name for the only name that could be dearer:—she is married—married to the eldest son of Mr. Lacy, the lineal representative of Dame Eleanor Lacy, the honoured foundress of the school. It was in a voice tremulous more from feeling than from age, that Mrs. Allen welcomed the young heir, when he brought his fair bride to Aberleigh; and it was with a yet stronger and deeper emotion that the bridegroom, with his own Jane in his hand, visited the

asylum which she and her venerable guardian owed to the benevolence and the piety of his ancestress, whose good deeds had thus showered down blessings on her remote posterity.

FANNY'S FAIRINGS.

A HAPPY boy was Thomas Stokes, the blacksmith's son, of Upton Lea, last May morning he was to go to B—— fair, with his eldest brother William, and his cousin Fanny, and he never closed his eyes all night for thinking of the pleasure he should enjoy on the morrow. Thomas, "for shortness called" Tom, was a lively, merry boy of nine years old, rising ten, as the horse-dealers say, and had never been at a fair in his life ; so that his sleeplessness as well as the frequent soliloquies of triumphant ho ! ho ! (his usual exclamation when highly pleased,) and the perpetual course of broad smiles in which his delight had been vented for a week before, were nothing remarkable. His companions were as wakeful and happy as himself. Now that might be accounted for in his cousin's case, since it was also her first fair ; for Fanny, a pretty dark-eyed lass of eighteen, was a Londoner, and, till she arrived that winter on a visit to her aunt, had never been out of the sound of Bow-bell ; but why William, a young blacksmith of one and twenty, to whom fairs were almost as

familiar as horse-shoes, why he should lose his sleep on the occasion, is less easy to discover—perhaps from sympathy. Through Tom's impatience the party were early astir; indeed, he had roused the whole house long before day-break; and betimes in the forenoon they sate forth on their progress; Tom in a state of spirits that caused him to say, Ho! ho! every minute, and much endangered the new hat that he was tossing in the air; William and Fanny, with a more concentrated and a far quieter joy. One should not see a finer young couple: he, decked in his Sunday attire, tall, sturdy, and muscular, with a fine open countenance, and an air of rustic gallantry that became him well; she, pretty and modest, with a look of gentility about her plain dark gown and cottage bonnet, and the little straw basket that she carried in her hand, which even more than her ignorance of tree, and bird, and leaf, and flower, proclaimed her town breeding;—although that ignorance was such, that Tom declared that on her first arrival at Upton Lea, she did not know an oak from an elm, or a sparrow from a blackbird. Tom himself had yet to learn poor Fanny's excuses, how much oaks and elms resemble each other in the London air, and how very closely in colour, though not in size, a city sparrow approaches to a blackbird.

Their way led through pleasant footpaths; every bank covered with cowslips and blue-bells, and over-

hung with the budding hawthorn, and the tasselled hazel; now between orchards, whose trees, one flush of blossom, rose from amidst beds of daffodils, with their dark waving spear-like leaves and golden flowers; now along fields, newly sown with barley, where the doves and wood-pigeons, pretty innocent thieves, were casting a glancing shadow on the ground as they flew from furrow to furrow, picking up the freshly-planted grain; and now between close lanes peopled with nightingales; until at last they emerged into the gay high road, where their little party fell into the flood of people pouring on to the fair, much after the manner in which a tributary brooklet is lost in the waters of some mighty stream.

A mingled stream in good sooth it was, a most motley procession! Country folks in all varieties, from the pink-ribboned maiden, the belle of her parish, tripping along so merrily, to the sober and demure village matron, who walked beside her with a slow lagging pace, as if tired already; from the gay Lothario of the hamlet, with his clean smock-frock, and his hat on one side, who strutted along, ogling the lass in the pink ribbons, to the "grave and reverend signor," the patriarch of the peasantry, with his straight white hair, and his well-preserved wedding-suit, who hobbled stoopingly on, charged with two great-grandchildren—a sprightly girl of six lugging him forward, a lumpish boy of three dragging him back. Children were there of all condi-

tions, from "mamma's darlings," in the coronet carriage—the little lords and ladies, to whom a fair was, as yet, only a "word of power," down to the brown gipsy urchins strapped on their mother's back, to whom it was a familiar sight—no end to the children! no end to the grown people! no end to the vehicles! Carts crammed as full as they could be stowed, gigs with one, two, three, and four inside passengers; waggons laden with men instead of corn; droves of pigs; flocks of sheep; herds of cattle; strings of horses; with their several drovers, and drivers of all kinds and countries—English, Irish, Welsh, and Scotch—all bound to the fair. Here an Italian boy with his tray of images; there a Savoyard with her hurdy-gurdy; and lastly, struggling through the midst of the throng, that painful minister of pleasure, an itinerant shewman, with his box of puppets and his tawdry wife, pushing, and toiling, and straining every nerve for fear of being too late. No end to the people! no end to the din! The turnpike-man opened his gate and shut his ears in despairing resignation. Never was known so full a May-fair.

And amongst the thousands assembled in the market-place at B—— it would have been difficult to find a happier group than our young cousins. Tom, to be sure, had been conscious of a little neglect on the part of his companions. The lectures on ornithology, with which, *chemin faisant*, he had thought fit to favour

Fanny (children do dearly love to teach grown people, and all country boys are learned in birds,) had been rather thrown away on that fair damsel. William and she had walked arm-in-arm ; and when he tried to join them on one side, he found himself cast off,—and when on the other, let go. Poor Tom was, evidently, detrop in the party. However, he bore the affront like a philosopher, and soon forgot his grievances in the solid luxuries of tarts and gingerbread ; in the pleasant busi- ness of purchasing and receiving petty presents ; in the chatter, the bustle, and the merriment of the fair. Amidst all his delight, however, he could not but feel a little curiosity, when William having lured him to a stall, and fixed him there in the interesting occupation of selecting a cricket-ball, persuaded Fanny to go under his escort to make some private purchases at the neigh- bouring shops. Tom's attention to his own important bargain was sadly distracted by watching his compa- nions as they proceeded from the linen-drapers to the jewellers, and from the jewellers to the pastry-cooks ; looking, the whilst, the one proud and happy, the other shy and ashamed. Tom could not tell what to make of it, and chose, in his perplexity, the very worst ball that was offered to him ; but as he had seen their several parcels snugly deposited in the straw basket, he sum- moned courage to ask, point blank, what it contained ; at which question, Fanny blushed, and William laughed ;

and on a repetition of the enquiry answered, with an arch smile—"Fanny's fairings." Now as Fanny had before purchased toys, and cakes, and such like trifles, for the whole family, this reply and the air with which it was delivered, served rather to stimulate than to repress the vague suspicions that were floating in the boy's brain. A crowd, however, is no place for impudent curiosity. Loneliness and ennui are necessary to the growth of that weed. If there had been a fair in Bluebeard's castle, his wives would have kept their heads on their shoulders; the blue chamber and the diamond key would have tempted in vain. So Tom betook himself to the enjoyment of the scene before him, applying himself the more earnestly to the business of pleasure, as they were to return to Upton Lea at four o'clock.

Four o'clock arrived, and found our hero, Thomas Stokes, still untired of stuffing and staring. He had eaten more cakes, oranges, and gingerbread, than the gentlest reader would deem credible; and he had seen well nigh all the sights of the fair;—the tall man, and the short woman, and the calf with two heads; had attended the in-door horsemanship and the out-door play; the dancing dogs and two raree-shows; and lastly, had visited and admired the wonders of the menagerie, scraped acquaintance with a whole legion of parrots and monkeys, poked up a boa-constrictor, patted a lioness, and had the honor of presenting his blunderbuss to the

elephant, although he was not much inclined to boast of this exploit, having been so frightened at his own temerity, as to run away out of the booth before the sagacious but deliberate quadruped had found time to fire.

Not a whit tired was Tom. He could have wished the fair to last a week. Nevertheless, he obeyed his brother's summons ; and the little party set out on their return, the two elder ones again linked arm-in-arm, and apparently forgetting that the world contained any human being except their own two selves. Poor Tom trudged after, beginning to feel, in the absence of other excitement, a severe relapse of his undefined curiosity, respecting Fanny's fairings. On tripped William and Fanny, and after trudged Tom, until a string of unruly horses passing rapidly by, threw the whole groupe into confusion, no one was hurt ; but the pretty Londoner was so much alarmed as to afford her companion ample employment in placing her on a bank, soothing her fears, and railing at the misconduct of the horse-people. As the cavalcade disappeared, the fair damsel recovered her spirits, and began to enquire for her basket, which she had dropped in her terror, and for Tom, who was also missing. They were not far to seek. Perched in the opposite hedge sate master Tom, in the very act of satisfying his curiosity by examining her basket, smiling and ho ! ho !-ing with all his might. Parcel after

parcel did he extract and unfold :—first a roll of white satin ribbon—“ ho ! ho !”—then a pair of white cambric gloves—“ ho ! ho !” again ;—then a rich-looking, dark-coloured, small plum-cake, nicely frosted with white sugar,—“ ho ! ho ! Miss Fanny !”—last of all a plain gold ring, wrapped in three papers, silver, white, and brown,—“ ho ! ho !” once more shouted the boy, twirling the wedding-ring on his own red finger, the fourth of the left hand,—“ so these are Fanny's fairings ! Ho ! ho !—ho ! ho !”

THE CHALK-PIT.

ONE of the most admirable persons whom I have ever known, is my friend Mrs. Mansfield, the wife of the good vicar of Aberleigh. Her daughters are just what might be expected from girls trained under such a mother. Of Clara, the youngest, I have spoken elsewhere. Ellen, the elder sister, is as delightful a piece of sunshine and gaiety as ever gladdened a country home. One never thinks whether she is pretty, there is such a play of feature, such a light in her dark eye, such an alternation of blush and smile on her animated countenance ; for Ellen has her mother's trick of blushing, although her "eloquent blood" speaks through the medium of a richer and browner skin. One forgets to make up one's mind as to her prettiness ; but it is quite certain that she is charming.

She has, in the very highest degree, those invaluable every-day spirits which require no artificial stimuli, no public amusements, no company, no flattery, no praise. Her sprightliness is altogether domestic. Her own dear

family, and a few dear friends, are all the listeners she ever thinks of. No one doubts but Ellen might be a wit, if she would : she is saved from that dangerous distinction as much by natural modesty as by a kind and constant consideration for the feelings of others. I have often seen a repartee flashing and laughing in her bright eyes, but seldom, very seldom, heard it escape her lips ; never unless quite equally matched and challenged to such a bout of “ bated foils” by some admirer of her playful conversation. They who have themselves that splendid but delusive talent, can best estimate the merit of such forbearance. Governed as it is in her, it makes the delight of the house, and supplies perpetual amusement to herself and to all about her.

Another of her delightful and delighting amusements, is her remarkable skill in drawing flowers. I have never seen any portraits so exactly resembling the originals, as her carnations and geraniums. If they could see themselves in her paintings, they might think that it was their own pretty selves in their looking-glass, the water. One reason for this wonderful verisimilitude is, that our fair artist never flatters the flowers that sit to her ; never puts leaves that ought to be there, but are not there, never makes them hold up their heads unreasonably, or places them in an attitude, or forces them into a groupe. Just as they are, she sets them down ; and if she does make any slight deviation from her models, she is so well

acquainted with their persons and habits, that all is in keeping ; you feel that so the plant might have looked. By the way, I do not know any accomplishment that I would more earnestly recommend to my young friends than this of flower-painting. It is a most quiet, unpretending, womanly employment ; a great amusement within doors, and a constant pleasure without. The enjoyment of a country walk is much enhanced when the chequered fritillary or the tinted wood anemone are to be sought, and found, and gathered, and made our own ; and the dear domestic spots, haunted by

“ Retired leisure,
Who in trim gardens takes his pleasure,”

are doubly gardens when the dahlias and china-asters, after flourishing there for their little day, are to reblossom on paper. Then it supplies such pretty keepsakes, the uncostly remembrances which are so pleasant to give and to take ; and, above all, it fosters and sharpens the habit of observation and the love of truth. How much of what is excellent in art, in literature, in conversation, and in conduct, is comprised in that little word !

Ellen had great delight in comparing our Sylvan Flora with the minute and fairy blossoms of the South Downs, where she had passed the greater part of her life. She could not but admit the superior luxuriance and variety of our woodland plants, and yet she had a good

deal to say in favour of the delicate, flowery carpet, which clothes the green hills of Sussex ; and in fact was on that point of honour a little jealous—a little, a very little, the least in the world, touchy. She loved her former abode, the abode of her childhood, with enthusiasm ; the downs : the sea, whose sound, as she said, seemed to follow her to her inland home, to dwell within her as it does in the folds of the sea-shell ; and, above all, she loved her old neighbours, high and low. I do not know whether Mrs. Mansfield or her daughters returned oftenest to the “ simple annals of the *Sussex poor*.” It was a subject of which they never wearied ; and we to whom they came, liked them the more for their clinging and lingering affection for those whom they had left. We received it as a pledge of what they would feel for us when we became better acquainted,—a pledge which has been amply redeemed. I flatter myself that Aberleigh now almost rivals their dear old parish ; only that Clara, who has been here three years, and is now eighteen, says, very gravely, that “ people as they grow old, cannot be expected to form the very strong local attachments which they did when they were young.” I wonder how old Clara will think herself when she comes to be eight-and-twenty ?

Between Ellen’s stories and her mother’s there is usually a characteristic difference ; those of the one being merry, those of the other grave. One occurrence,

however, was equally impressed on the mind of either. I shall try to tell it as shortly and simply as it was told to me; but it will want the charm of Mrs. Mansfield's touching voice, and of Ellen's glistening eyes.

Toward the bottom of one of the green hills of the parish of Lanton, was a large deserted chalk-pit; a solemn and ghastly-looking place, blackened in one part by an old lime-kiln, whose ruinous fragments still remained, and in others mossy and weather-stained, and tinted with every variety of colour—green, yellow, and brown. The excavation extended far within the sides of the hill, and the edges were fringed by briar and bramble and ivy, contrasting strongly with the smooth, level verdure of the turf above, whilst plants of a ranker growth, nettles, docks, and fumatory, sprang up beneath, adding to the wildness and desolation of the scene. The road that led by the pit was little frequented. The place had an evil name; none cared to pass it even in the glare of the noon-day sun; and the villagers would rather go a mile about, than catch a glimpse of it when the pale moonlight brought into full relief those cavernous white walls, and the dark briars and ivy waved fitfully in the night wind. It was a vague and shuddering feeling. None knew why he feared, or what; but the awe and the avoidance were general, and the owls and the bats remained in undisturbed possession of Lanton chalk-pit.

One October day, the lively work of ploughing, and wheat-sowing, and harrowing, was going on all at once in a great field just beyond the dreaded spot : a pretty and an interesting scene, especially on sloping ground, and under a gleaming sun throwing an ever-shifting play of light and shadow over the landscape. Towards noon, however, the clouds began to gather, and one of the tremendous pelting showers, peculiar to the coast, came suddenly on. Seedsmen, ploughmen, and carters, hastened home with their teams, leaving the boys to follow ; and they, five in number, set out at their fullest speed. The storm increased apace ; and it was evident that their thin jackets and old smock-frocks would be drenched through and through long before they could reach Lanton Great Farm. In this dilemma, James Goddard, a stout lad of fifteen, the biggest and boldest of the party, proposed to take shelter in the chalk-pit. Boys are naturally thoughtless and fearless ; the real inconvenience was more than enough to counterbalance the imaginary danger, and they all willingly adopted the plan, except one timid child, eight years old, who shrank and hung back.

Harry Lee was a widow's son. His father, a fisherman, had perished at sea, a few months after the birth of this only child ; and his mother, a fond and delicate woman, had reared him delicately and fondly, beyond her apparent means. Night and day had she laboured

for her poor Harry ; and nothing but a long illness and the known kindness of the farmer in whose service he was placed, had induced her to part with him at so early an age.

Harry was, indeed, a sweet and gracious boy, noticed by every stranger for his gentleness and beauty. He had a fair, blooming, open countenance ; large, mild, blue eyes, which seemed to ask kindness in every glance ; and a quantity of shining, light hair, curling in ringlets round his neck. He was the best reader in Mrs. Mansfield's Sunday-school ; and only the day before, Miss Clara had given him a dinner to carry home to his mother, in reward of his proficiency : indeed, although they tried to conceal it, Harry was the decided favourite of both the young ladies. James Goddard, under whom he worked, and to whose care he had been tearfully committed by the widow Lee, was equally fond of him, in a rougher way ; and in the present instance, seeing the delicate boy shivering between cold and fear at the outside of the pit, (for the same constitutional timidity which prevented his entering, hindered him from going home by himself,) he caught him up in his arms, brought him in, and deposited him in the snuggest recess, on a heap of dry chalk. " Well, Harry, is not this better than standing in the wet ?" said he kindly, sitting down by his protégé, and sharing with him a huge luncheon of bread and cheese ; and the poor child smiled in his face,

thanked him, and kissed him as he had been used to kiss his mother.

Half an hour had passed away in boyish talk, and still the storm continued. At last James Goddard thought that he heard a strange and unaccustomed sound, as of bursting or cracking—an awful and indescribable sound—low, and yet distinctly audible, although the wind and rain were raging, and the boys loud in mirth and laughter. He seemed to feel the sound, as he said afterwards; and was just about to question his companions if they too heard that unearthly noise; when a horseman passed along the road, making signs to them and shouting. His words were drowned in the tempest; James rushed out to enquire his meaning, and in that moment the side of the chalk-pit fell in! He heard a crash and a scream—the death scream! —felt his back grazed by the descending mass; and, turning round, saw the hill rent, as by an earthquake, and the excavation which had sheltered them, filled, piled, heaped up, by the still quivering and gigantic fragments—no vestige left to tell where it was, or where his wretched companions lay buried!

“ Harry! Harry! the child! the child!” was his first thought and his first exclamation; “ Help! instant help!” was the next, and, assisted by the stranger horseman, whose speed had been stayed by the awful catastrophe, the village of Lanton was quickly alarmed, and

its inhabitants assembled on the spot. Who may describe that scene? Fathers, brothers, kinsmen, friends, digging literally for life! every nerve quivering with exertion, and yet all exertion felt to be unavailing. Mothers and sisters looking on in agony; and the poor widow Lee, and poor, poor, James Goddard, the self-accuser! A thousand and a thousand times did he crave pardon of that distracted mother, for the peril—the death of her son; for James felt that there could be no hope for the helpless child, and tears, such as no personal calamity could have drawn from the strong-hearted lad, fell fast for his fate. Hour after hour the men of Lanton laboured, and all was in vain. The mass seemed impenetrable, inexhaustible. Toward sunset one boy appeared, crushed and dead; another, who shewed some slight signs of life, and who still lives, a cripple; a third dead; and then, last of all, Harry Lee. Alas! only by his raiment could that fond mother know her child! His death must have been instantaneous. She did not linger long. The three boys were interred together in Lanton church-yard on the succeeding Sabbath; and before the end of the year, the widow Lee was laid by her son.

WHITSUN-EVE.

THE pride of my heart and the delight of my eyes is my garden. Our house, which is in dimensions very much like a bird-cage, and might, with almost equal convenience, be laid on a shelf, or hung up in a tree, would be utterly unbearable in warm weather, were it not that we have a retreat out of doors,—and a very pleasant retreat it is. To make my readers fully comprehend it, I must describe our whole territories.

Fancy a small plot of ground, with a pretty low irregular cottage at one end ; a large granary, divided from the dwelling by a little court running along one side ; and a long thatched shed open towards the garden, and supported by wooden pillars on the other. The bottom is bounded, half by an old wall, and half by an old paling, over which we see a pretty distance of woody hills. The house, granary, wall, and paling, are covered with vines, cherry-trees, roses, honeysuckles, and jessamines, with great clusters of tall hollyhocks running up between them ; a large elder overhanging the little gate, and a magnificent bay-tree, such a tree as shall scarcely

be matched in these parts, breaking with its beautiful conical form the horizontal lines of the buildings. This is my garden ; and the long pillared shed, the sort of rustic arcade which runs along one side, parted from the flower-beds by a row of rich geraniums, is our out-of-door drawing-room.

I know nothing so pleasant as to sit there on a summer afternoon, with the western sun flickering through the great elder-tree, and lighting up our gay parterres, where flowers and flowering shrubs are set as thick as grass in a field, a wilderness of blossom, interwoven, intertwined, wreathy, garlandy, profuse beyond all profusion, where we may guess that there is such a thing as mould, but never see it. I know nothing so pleasant as to sit in the shade of that dark bower, with the eye resting on that bright piece of colour, lighted so gloriously by the evening sun, now catching a glimpse of the little birds as they fly rapidly in and out of their nests—for there are always two or three birds-nests in the thick tapestry of cherry-trees, honeysuckles, and China-roses, which cover our walls—now tracing the gay gambols of the common butterflies as they sport around the dahlias ; now watching that rarer moth, which the country people, fertile in pretty names, call the bee-bird * ; that bird-like insect, which flutters in the hottest days

* *Sphinx ligustri*, privet hawk-moth.

over the sweetest flowers, inserting its long proboscis into the small tube of the jessamine, and hovering over the scarlet blossoms of the geranium, whose bright colour seems reflected on its own feathery breast; that insect which seems so thoroughly a creature of the air, never at rest; always, even when feeding, self-poised, and self-supported, and whose wings, in their ceaseless motion, have a sound so deep, so full, so lulling, so musical. Nothing so pleasant as to sit amid that mixture of the flower and the leaf, watching the bee-bird! Nothing so pretty to look at as my garden! It is quite a picture; only unluckily it resembles a picture in more qualities than one,—it is fit for nothing but to look at. One might as well think of walking in a bit of framed canvass. There are walks to be sure—tiny paths of smooth gravel, by courtesy called such—but they are so overhung by roses and lilies, and such gay encroachers—so over-run by convolvulus, and heart's-ease, and mignonette, and other sweet stragglers, that, except to edge through them occasionally, for the purposes of planting, or weeding, or watering, there might as well be no paths at all. Nobody thinks of walking in my garden. Even May glides along with a delicate and trackless step, like a swan through the water; and we, its two-footed denizens, are fain to treat it as if it were really a saloon, and go out for a walk towards sun-set, just as if we had not been sitting in the open air all day.

What a contrast from the quiet garden to the lively street! Saturday night is always a time of stir and bustle in our Village, and this is Whitsun-Eve, the pleasantest Saturday of all the year, when London journeymen and servant lads and lasses snatch a short holiday to visit their families. A short and precious holiday, the happiest and liveliest of any; for even the gambols and merry-makings of Christmas offer but a poor enjoyment, compared with the rural diversions, the Mayings, revels, and cricket-matches of Whitsuntide.

We ourselves are to have a cricket-match on Monday, not played by the men, who, since a certain misadventure with the Beech-hillers, are, I am sorry to say, rather chap-fallen, but by the boys, who, zealous for the honour of their parish, and headed by their bold leader, Ben Kirby, marched in a body to our antagonist's ground the Sunday after our melancholy defeat, challenged the boys of that proud hamlet, and beat them out and out on the spot. Never was a more signal victory. Our boys enjoyed this triumph with so little moderation that it had like to have produced a very tragical catastrophe. The captain of the Beech-hill youngsters, a capital bowler, by name Amos Stone, enraged past all bearing by the crowing of his adversaries, flung the ball at Ben Kirby with so true an aim, that if that sagacious leader had not warily ducked his head when he saw it coming, there would probably have

been a coroner's inquest on the case, and Amos Stone would have been tried for manslaughter. He let fly with such vengeance, that the cricket-ball was found embedded in a bank of clay five hundred yards off, as if it had been a cannon shot. Tom Coper and Farmer Thackum, the umpires, both say that they never saw so tremendous a ball. If Amos Stone live to be a man (I mean to say, if he be not hanged first,) he'll be a pretty player. He is coming here on Monday with his party to play the return match, the umpires having respectively engaged Farmer Thackum that Amos shall keep the peace, Tom Coper that Ben shall give no unnecessary or wanton provocation—a nicely-worded and lawyer-like clause, and one that proves that Tom Coper hath his doubts of the young gentleman's discretion ; and, of a truth, so have I. I would not be Ben Kirby's surety, cautiously as the security is worded,—no ! not for a white double dahlia, the present object of my ambition.

This village of our's is swarming to-night like a hive of bees, and all the church bells round are pouring out their merriest peals, as if to call them together. I must try to give some notion of the various figures.

First there is a groupe suited to Teniers, a cluster of out-of-door customers of the Rose, old benchers of the inn, who sit round a table smoking and drinking in high solemnity to the sound of Timothy's fiddle. Next, a

mass of eager boys, the combatants of Monday, who are surrounding the shoemaker's shop, where an invisible hole in their ball is mending by Master Keep himself, under the joint superintendence of Ben Kirby and Tom Coper. Ben showing much verbal respect and outward deference for his umpire's judgment and experience, but managing to get the ball done his own way after all ; whilst outside the shop, the rest of the eleven, the less-trusted commons, are shouting and bawling round Joel Brent, who is twisting the waxed twine round the handles of the bats—the poor bats, which please nobody, which the taller youths are despising as too little and too light, and the smaller are abusing as too heavy and too large. Happy critics ! winning their match can hardly be a greater delight—even if to win it they be doomed ! Farther down the street is the pretty black-eyed girl, Sally Wheeler, come home for a day's holiday from B., escorted by a tall footman in a dashing livery, whom she is trying to curtsy off before her deaf grandmother sees him. I wonder whether she will succeed !

Ascending the hill are two couples of a different description. Daniel Tubb and his fair Valentine, walking boldly along like licensed lovers ; they have been asked twice in church, and are to be married on Tuesday ; and closely following that happy pair, near each other, but not together, come Jem Tanner and Mabel Green, the poor culprits of the wheat-hoeing. Ah ! the little

clerk hath not relented ! The course of true love doth not yet run smooth in that quarter. Jem dodges along, whistling “cherry-ripe,” pretending to walk by himself, and to be thinking of nobody ; but every now and then he pauses in his negligent saunter, and turns round outright to steal a glance at Mabel, who, on her part, is making believe to walk with poor Olive Hathaway, the lame mantua-maker, and even affecting to talk and to listen to that gentle, humble creature, as she points to the wild flowers on the common, and the lambs and children disporting amongst the gorse, but whose thoughts and eyes are evidently fixed on Jem Tanner, as she meets his backward glance with a blushing smile, and half-springs forward to meet him ; whilst Olive has broken off the conversation as soon as she perceived the pre-occupation of her companion, and begun humming, perhaps unconsciously, two or three lines of Burns, whose “ Whistle and I'll come to thee, my love,” and “ Gi'e me a glance of thy bonnie black ee,” were never better exemplified than in the couple before her. Really it is curious to watch them, and to see how gradually the attraction of this tantalizing vicinity becomes irresistible, and the rustic lover rushes to his pretty mistress like the needle to the magnet. On they go, trusting to the deepening twilight, to the little clerk's absence, to the good humour of the happy lads and lasses, who are passing and repassing on all sides—or rather, per-

haps, in a happy oblivion of the cross uncle, the kind villagers, the squinting lover, and the whole world. On they trip, linked arm-in-arm, he trying to catch a glimpse of her glowing face under her bonnet, and she hanging down her head and avoiding his gaze with a mixture of modesty and coquetry, which well becomes the rural beauty. On they go, with a reality and intensity of affection, which must overcome all obstacles ; and poor Olive follows with an evident sympathy in their happiness, which makes her almost as enviable as they ; and we pursue our walk amidst the moonshine and the nightingales, with Jacob Frost's cart looming in the distance, and the merry sounds of Whitsuntide, the shout, the laugh, and the song echoing all around us, like " noises of the air."

JESSY LUCAS.

ABOUT the centre of a deep, winding, and woody lane, in our neighbouring village of Aberleigh, stands an old farm-house, whose stables, out-buildings, and ample barn-yard, have a peculiarly forlorn and deserted appearance ; they can, in fact, scarcely be said to be occupied ; the person who rents the land, preferring to live at a large farm about a mile distant, leaving this lonely house to the care of a labourer and his wife, who reside in one end, and have the charge of a few colts and heifers, that run in the orchard and an adjoining meadow ; while the vacant rooms are tenanted by a widow in humble circumstances, and her young family.

The house is beautifully situated ; deep, as I have said, in a narrow woody lane, which winds between high banks, now feathered with hazel, now studded with pollards and forest trees ; until opposite Kibe's farm, it widens sufficiently to admit a large clear pond, round which the hedge, closely and regularly set, with a row of tall elms, sweeps in a graceful curve, forming for that bright mirror, a rich leafy frame. A little way farther on,

the lane widens, and makes an abrupt winding, as it is crossed by a broad shallow stream, a branch of the Loddon, which comes meandering along, from a chain of beautiful meadows, then turns in a narrower channel, by the side of the road, and finally spreads itself into a large piece of water, almost a lakelet, amidst the rushes and willows of Hartley Moor. A foot-bridge is flung over the stream, where it crosses the lane, which, with a giant oak growing on the bank, and throwing its broad branches far on the opposite side, forms in every season, a pretty rural picture.

Kibe's farm is as picturesque as its situation; very old, very irregular, with gable ends, clustered chimneys, casement windows, a large porch, and a sort of square wing, jutting out even with the porch, and covered with a luxuriant vine, which has quite the effect, especially when seen by moon-light, of an ivy-mantled tower. On one side, extend the ample, but disused farm-buildings; on the other, the old orchard, whose trees are so wild, so hoary, and so huge, as to convey the idea of a fruit forest. Behind the house is an ample kitchen-garden, and before, a neat flower-court, the exclusive demesne of Mrs. Lucas and her family, to whom indeed, the labourer, John Miles, and his good wife Dinah, served, in some sort, as domestics.

Mrs. Lucas had known far better days; her husband had been an officer, and died fighting bravely in one of

the great victories of the last war, leaving her with three children, one lovely boy, and two delicate girls, to struggle through the world, as best she might. She was an accomplished woman, and at first settled in a great town, and endeavoured to improve her small income by teaching music and languages. But she was country bred ; her children too had been born in the country, amidst the sweetest recesses of the New Forest, and pining herself for liberty, and solitude, and green fields, and fresh air, she soon began to fancy that her children were visibly deteriorating in health and appearance, and pining for them also : and finding that her old servant, Dinah Miles, was settled with her husband in this deserted farm-house, she applied to his master, to rent, for a few months, the untenanted apartments, came to Aberleigh, and fixed there apparently for life.

We lived in different parishes, and she declined company, so that I seldom met Mrs. Lucas, and had lost sight of her for some time, retaining merely a general recollection of the mild, placid, elegant mother, surrounded by three rosy, romping, bright-eyed children, when the arrival of an intimate friend at Aberleigh vicarage, caused me frequently to pass the lonely farm-house, and threw this interesting family again under my observation.

The first time that I saw them, was on a bright summer evening, when the nightingale was yet in the coppice, the brier-rose blossoming in the hedge, and the

sweet scent of the bean-fields perfuming the air. Mrs. Lucas, still lovely and elegant, though somewhat faded and care-worn, was walking pensively up and down the grass-path of the pretty flower-court : her eldest daughter, a rosy bright brunette, with her dark hair floating in all directions, was darting about like a bird : now tying up the pinks, now watering the geraniums ; now collecting the fallen rose-leaves into the straw bonnet, which dangled from her arm ; and now feeding a brood of bantams from a little barley measure, which that sagacious and active colony seemed to recognize as if by instinct, coming, long before she called them, at their swiftest pace, between a run and a fly, to await, with their usual noisy and bustling patience, the showers of grain, which she flung to them across the paling. It was a beautiful picture of youth, and health, and happiness ; and her clear, gay voice, and brilliant smile, accorded well with her shape and motion, as light as a butterfly, and as wild as the wind. A beautiful picture was that rosy lass of fifteen, in her unconscious loveliness, and I might have continued gazing upon her longer, had I not been attracted by an object no less charming, although in a very different way.

It was a slight elegant girl, apparently about a year younger than the pretty romp of the flower-garden, not unlike her in form and feature, but totally distinct in colouring and expression.

She sate in the old porch, wreathed with jessamine and honeysuckle, with the western sun floating round her like a glory, and displaying the singular beauty of her chesnut hair, brown, with a golden light, and the exceeding delicacy of her smooth and finely-grained complexion, so pale, and yet so healthful. Her whole face and form had a bending and statue-like grace, increased by the adjustment of her splendid hair, which was parted on her white forehead, and gathered up behind in a large knot, a natural coronet. Her eye-brows, and long eye-lashes, were a few shades darker than her hair, and singularly rich and beautiful. She was plaiting straw, rapidly, and skilfully, and bent over her work with a mild and placid attention, a sedate pensiveness that did not belong to her age, and which contrasted strangely and sadly with the gaiety of her laughing and brilliant sister, who at this moment darted up to her with a handful of pinks and some groundsel. Jessy received them with a smile : such a smile ! spoke a few sweet words, in a sweet sighing voice ; put the flowers in her bosom, and the groundsel in the cage of a linnet that hung near her ; and then resumed her seat, and her work, imitating, better than I have ever heard them imitated, the various notes of a nightingale who was singing in the opposite hedge, whilst I, ashamed of loitering longer, passed on.

The next time I saw her, my interest in this lovely

creature was increased tenfold, for I then knew that Jessy was blind ; a misfortune always so touching, especially in early youth, and in her case rendered peculiarly affecting by the personal character of the individual. We soon became acquainted, and even intimate, under the benign auspices of the kind mistress of the vicarage, and every interview served to increase the interest excited by the whole family, and most of all, by the sweet blind girl.

Never was any human being more gentle, generous and grateful, or more unfeignedly resigned to her great calamity ; the pensiveness that marked her character arose, as I soon perceived, from a different source. Her blindness had been of recent occurrence, arising from inflammation, unskilfully treated, and was pronounced incurable ; but from coming on so lately, it admitted of several alleviations, of which she was accustomed to speak with a devout and tender gratitude. "She could work," she said, "as well as ever ; and cut out, and write, and dress herself, and keep the keys, and run errands in the house she knew so well, without making any mistake or confusion. Reading, to be sure, she had been forced to give up, and drawing, and some day or other she would shew me, only that it seemed so vain, some verses which her brother William had written upon a groupe of wild flowers which she had begun before her misfortune. Oh ! it was almost worth while to be .

blind, to be the subject of such verse, and the object of such affection. Her dear mama was very good to her, and so was Emma, but William ! oh she wished that I knew William ! no one could be so kind as he ! oh it was impossible ! He read to her, he talked to her, he walked with her, he taught her to feel confidence in walking alone ; he had made for her the wooden steps up the high bank which led into Kibe's meadow. He had put the hand-rail on the old bridge, so that now she could get across without danger, even when the brook was flooded. He had tamed her linnet ; he had constructed the wooden frame, by the aid of which she could write so comfortably and evenly ; could write letters to him, and say her own self, all that she felt of love and gratitude ; and that," she continued with a deep sigh, "was her chief comfort now, for William was gone, and they should never meet again ; never alive, that she was sure of, she knew it." "But why, Jessy ?" "Oh because William was so much too good for this world, there was nobody like William ! and he was gone for a soldier. Old General Lucas, her father's uncle, had sent for him abroad, had given him a commission in his regiment, and he would never come home, at least they should never meet again, of that she was sure—she knew it !"

This persuasion was evidently the master grief of poor Jessy's life ; the cause, which far more than her blind-

ness, faded her cheek, and saddened her spirit. How it had arisen, no one knew, partly perhaps from some lurking superstition, some idle word, or idler omen which had taken root in her mind, nourished by the calamity, which in other respects, she bore so calmly, but which left her so often in darkness and loneliness to brood over her own gloomy forebodings ; partly from her trembling sensibility, and partly from the delicacy of frame and of habit, which had always characterized the object of her love, a slender youth, whose ardent spirit was but too apt to overtak his body.

However it found admittance, there the presentiment was, hanging like a dark cloud, over the sun-shine of Jessy's young life. Reasoning was useless ; they know little of the passions who seek to argue with that most intractable of them all, the fear that is born of love. So Mrs. Lucas and Emma tried to amuse away these sad thoughts, trusting to time, to William's letters, and above all to William's return to eradicate the evil. The letters came punctually and gaily ; letters that might have quieted the heart of any sister in England, except the fluttering heart of Jessy Lucas. William spoke of improved health, of increased strength, of actual promotion, and expected recal. At last he even announced his return, under auspices the most gratifying to his mother, and the most beneficial to her family. The regiment was ordered home, and the old and wealthy re-

lation, under whose protection he had already risen so rapidly, had expressed his intention to accompany him to Kibe's farm, to be introduced to his nephew's widow, and daughters, especially Jessy, for whom he expressed himself greatly interested. A letter from General Lucas himself, which arrived by the same post, was still more explicit; it adduced the son's admirable character, and exemplary conduct, as reasons for befriending the mother, and avowed his design of providing for each of his young relations, and of making William his heir.

For half an hour after the first hearing of these letters, Jessy was happy; till the peril of a winter voyage, for it was deep January, crossed her imagination, and checked her joy. At length, long before they were expected, another letter arrived, dated Portsmouth. They had sailed by the next vessel to that which conveyed their previous despatches, and might be expected hourly at Kibe's farm. The voyage was past, safely past, and the weight seemed now really taken from Jessy's heart. She raised her sweet face, and smiled; yet still it was a fearful and trembling joy, and somewhat of fear was mingled even with the very intensity of her hope.

It had been a time of wind and rain, and the Loddon, the beautiful Loddon, always so affluent of water, had overflowed its boundaries, and swelled the smaller streams which it fed into torrents. The brook which crossed Kibe's lane, had washed away part of the foot-

bridge, destroying poor William's railing, and was still foaming and dashing, like a cataract. Now this was the nearest way; and if William should insist on coming that way! To be sure, the carriage-road was round by Grazeley Green, but to cross the road would save half a mile; and William, dear William, would never think of danger, to get to those whom he loved. These were Jessy's thoughts; the fear seemed impossible, for no postillion would think of breasting that roaring stream; but the fond sister's heart was fluttering like a new-caught bird, and she feared she knew not what.

All day she paced the little court, and stopped and listened, and listened and stopped. About sun-set, with the nice sense of sound, which seemed to come with her fearful calamity, and that fine sense quickened by anxiety, expectation, and love, she heard, she thought she heard, she was sure she heard the sound of a carriage rapidly advancing on the other side of the stream. "It is only the noise of the rushing waters," cried Emma. "I hear a carriage, the horses, the wheels," replied Jessy; and darted off at once, with the double purpose of meeting William and warning the postillion against crossing the stream. Emma and her mother followed, fast! fast! but what speed could vie with Jessy's, when the object was William! They called, but she neither heard, nor answered. Before they had won to the bend in the lane, she had reached the brook, and long before

either of her pursuers had gained the bridge, her foot had slipt, from the wet and tottering plank, and she was borne resistlessly down the stream. Assistance was immediately procured ; men, and boats, and ropes ; for the sweet blind girl was beloved by all ; and many a poor man perilled his life, in a fruitless endeavour to save Jessy Lucas. And William too was there, for Jessy's quickened sense had not deceived her. William was there, struggling with all the strength of love and agony, to rescue that dear and helpless creature : but every effort, although he persevered, 'till he too was taken out senseless—every effort was vain. The fair corse was recovered, but life was extinct. Poor Jessy's prediction was verified to the letter ; and the brother and his favourite sister never met again.

A COUNTRY BARBER.

In the little primitive town of Cranley, where I spent the first few years of my life—a town, which but for the distinction of a market and a post-office, might have passed for a moderately-sized village—the houses in that part of the great western road which passed through it, were so tumbled about, so intermixed with garden walls, garden palings, and garden hedges, to say nothing of stables, farm-yards, pigsties and barns, that it derogated nothing from the dignity of the handsome and commodious dwelling in which I had the honour to be born, that its next-door neighbour was a barber's shop, a real, genuine, old-fashioned barber's shop, consisting of a low-browed cottage, with a pole before it; a basin, as bright as Mambrino's helmet, in the window; a half-hatch always open, through which was visible a little dusty hole, where a few wigs, on battered wooden blocks, were ranged round a comfortable shaving chair; and a legend over the door, in which “ William Skinner, wig-maker, hair-dresser, and barber,” was set forth in yellow letters on a blue ground. I left Cranley be-

fore I was four years old ; and, next to a certain huge wax-doll, called Sophy, who died the usual death of wax-dolls, by falling out of the nursery-window, the most vivid and the pleasantest of my early recollections is our good neighbour Will Skinner—for by that endearing abbreviation he was called every where but in his own inscription. So agreeable, indeed, is the impression which he has left on my memory, that although, doubtless, the he-people find it more convenient to shave themselves, and to dispense with wigs and powder, yet I cannot help regretting, the more for his sake, the decline and extinction of a race, which, besides figuring so notably in the old novels and comedies, formed so genial a link between the higher and lower orders of society ; supplying to the rich the most familiar of followers and most harmless of gossips.

It certainly was not Will Skinner's beauty that caught my fancy. His person was hardly of the kind to win a lady's favour, even although that lady were only four years of age. He was an elderly man, with an infirm feeble step, which gave him the air of being older than he was ; a lank, long, stooping figure, which seemed wavering in the wind like a powder-puff ; a spare wrinkled visage, with the tremulous appearance about the mouth and cheeks which results from extreme thinness ; a pale complexion ; scanty white hair ; and a beard considerably longer than beseeemed his craft.

Neither did his apparel serve greatly to set off his lean and wrinkled person. It was usually composed within-doors, of a faded linen jacket ; without, of a grey pepper-and-salt coat, repaired with black ; both somewhat the worse for wear ; both “a world too wide for his shrunk” sides, and both well covered with powder. Dusty as a miller was Will Skinner. Even the hat, which by frequent reverential applications of his finger and thumb, had become moulded into a perpetual form of salutation, was almost as richly frosted as a church-warden’s wig. Add to this a white apron, with a comb sticking out of the pocket ; shoes clumsily patched—poor Will was his own cobbler ; blue stockings, indifferently darned—he was to boot his own sempstress ; and a ragged white cravat, marvellously badly ironed—for he was also his own washerwoman ; and the picture will be complete.

Good old man ! I see him in my mind’s eye at this moment ; lean, wrinkled, shabby, poor, slow of speech, and ungainly of aspect ; yet pleasant to look at and delightful to recollect, in spite of rags, ugliness, age, and poverty. It was the contented expression of his withered countenance, the cheerful humility of his deportment, and the overflowing kindness of his temper, that rendered Will Skinner so general a favourite. There was nothing within his small power that he was not ready to undertake for any body. At home in every

house, and coaversant in every business, he was the universal help of the place. Poor he was certainly, as poor as well could be, and lonely ; for he had been crossed in love in his youth, and lived alone in his little tenement, with no other companions than his wig-blocke and a tame starling, (" pretty company" he used to call them) ; but destitute as he was of worldly goods, and although people loved to talk of him with a kind of gentle pity, I have always considered him as one of the happiest persons of my acquaintance ; one " who suffered all as suffering nothing ;" a philosopher rather of temperament than of reason ; " the only man in the parish," as mine host of the Swan used to observe, " who was foolish enough to take a drink of small-beer as thankfully as a draught of double ale."

His fortunes had, at one time, assumed a more flourishing aspect. Our little insignificant town was one of the richest livings in England, and had been held by the Bishop of * * *, in conjunction with his very poor see. He resided nearly half the year at Cranley Rectory, and was the strenuous friend and patron of our friend Will. A most orthodox person at all points was the Bishop, portly, comely, and important ; one who had won his way to the Bench by learning and merit, and was rather more finical about his episcopal decorations, and more jealous of his episcopal dignity, than a man early accustomed to artificial distinctions is apt to be. He omitted

no opportunity of rustling and bustling in a silk apron ; assumed the lawn sleeves whenever it was possible to introduce those inconvenient but pleasant appendages to the clerical costume ; and was so precise in the article of perukes, as to have had one constructed in London on the exact model of the caxon worn by the then Archbishop of Canterbury, which our orthodox divine appears to have considered as a sort of regulation wig. Now this magnificent cauliflower, (for such it was,) had never been frosted to his Lordship's satisfaction until it came under the hands of Will Skinner, who was immediately appointed his shaver, wig-dresser, and wig-maker in ordinary, and recommended by him to all the beards and caxons in the neighbourhood. Nor did the kindness of his right reverend patron end here. Pleased with his barber's simplicity and decency of demeanour, as well as with the zealous manner in which he led the psalmody at church, quivering forth in a high thin voice the strains of Hopkins and Sternhold, the good Bishop determined to promote him in that line ; appointed him to the sextonship which happened to fall vacant ; and caused him to officiate as deputy to David Hunt, the parish-clerk—a man of eighty, worn out in the service, and now bed-ridden with the rheumatism—with a complete understanding that he should succeed to the post, as soon as David was fairly deposited in the church-yard. These were comfortable prospects. But, alas !

the Bishop, a hale man of sixty, happened to die first ; and his successor in the rectory, a little, thin, bald-headed person, as sharp as a needle, who shaved himself and wore no wigs, took such disgust at certain small irregularities, such as marking the evening lessons instead of the morning, forgetting to say Amen in the proper place, and other mistakes committed in his trepidation by the clerk-deputy when the new incumbent came to read in, that, instead of the translation to a higher post, which poor Will anticipated, he was within an ace of losing his sextonship, which he was only permitted to retain, on condition of never raising his voice again in a stave so long as he lived ; the rector, a musical amateur, having been so excruciated by Will's singing, as to be fain to stop his ears. Thus ended all his hopes of church preferment.

After this disaster, the world began to go ill with him. People learnt to shave themselves, that was a great evil ; they took to wearing their own hair, that was a greater ; and when the French revolution and cropped heads came into fashion, and powder and hair-dressing went out, such was the defalcation of his customers, and the desolate state of his trade, that poor Will, in spite of the smallness of his wants, and the equanimity of his spirit, found himself nearly at his wit's end. In this dilemma he resolved to turn his hand to other employments ; and living in the neighbourhood of a famous trout stream,

and becoming possessed of a tattered copy of Izaak Walton's Complete Angler, he applied himself to the construction of artificial flies ; in which delicate manufacture, facilitated doubtless by his dexterity in wig-weaving, he soon became deservedly eminent.

This occupation he usually followed in his territory, the Church-yard, as pleasant a place to be buried in as heart could desire, occupying a gentle eminence by the side of Cranley Down, on which the cricketers of that cricketing country used to muster two elevens for practice, almost every fine evening, from Easter to Michaelmas. Thither Will, who had been a cricketer himself in his youth, and still loved the wind of a ball, used to resort on summer afternoons ; perching himself on a large square raised monument, whose very inscription was worn away, a spreading lime-tree above his head, Izaak Walton before him, and his implements of trade at his side. I never read that delicious book without remembering how Will Skinner used to study it. Skipping the fine pastoral poetry, and still more poetical prose of the dialogues, and poring over the notes, as a housekeeper pores over the receipts in the Cook's Oracle, or a journeyman apothecary applies himself to the London Pharmacopeia. Curious directions of a truth they were, and curiously followed. The very list of materials had in it something striking and outlandish ; camel's hair, badger's hair, hog's wool, seal's fur, cock's

huckles, a heron's neck, a starling's wing, a mallard's tail, and the crest of a peacock !

These, and a thousand such knick-knacks, a wilderness of fur and feather, were ranged beside him, with real nicety, but seeming confusion ; and mingled with flies, finished or in progress, and with homelier and more familiar tools, hooks, bristles, shoe-maker's-wax, needles, scissars, marking silk of all colours, and " barge sail for dubbing." And there he sate, now manufacturing a cannon-fly, " dubbing it with black wool, and Isabella-coloured mohair, and bright brownish bear's hair, warped on with yellow silk, shaping the wings of the feather of a woodcock's wing, and working the head of an ash colour," and now watching Tom Taylor's unparagomed bowling, or throwing away the half-dubbed cannon-fly, in admiration of Jem Willis's hits.

On this spot our intimacy commenced. A spoilt child and an only child, it was my delight to escape from nurse and nursery, and all the restraint of female management, and to follow every where the dear papa, my chief spoiler, who so fully returned my partiality, as to have a little pad constructed on which I used to accompany him in his excursions on horseback.

The only place at which his fondness ever allowed him to think my presence burthensome was the cricket ground, to which I used regularly to follow him in spite of all remonstrance and precaution, causing him no

small perplexity, as to how to bestow me in safety during the game. Will and the monument seemed to offer exactly the desired refuge, and our good neighbour readily consented to fill the post of deputy nursery-maid for the time, assisted in his superintendence by a very beautiful and sagacious black Newfoundland dog, called Coe, who partly from a sense of duty, and partly from personal affection, used when out to take me under his particular care, and mounted guard over the monument as well as Will Skinner, who assuredly required all the aid that could be mustered to cope with my vagaries.

Poor dear old man, what a life I led him!—now playing at bo-peep on one side of the great monument, and now on the other; now crawling away amongst the green graves; now starting up between two head-stones; now shouting in triumph with my small childish voice, from the low church-yard wall; now gliding round before him, and laughing up in his face as he sate. Poor dear old man! with what undeviating good humour did he endure my naughtiness! How he would catch me away from the very shadow of danger if a ball came near! and how often did he interrupt his own labours to forward my amusement, sliding from his perch to gather lime branches to stick in Coe's collar, or to collect daisies, buttercups, or ragged-robins to make what I used to call daisy-beds for my doll.

Perhaps there might be a little self-defence in this

last-mentioned kindness ; the picking to pieces of flowers and making of daisy-beds being, as Will well knew, the most efficacious means of hindering me from picking to pieces his oak-flies or May-flies ; or, which was still worse, of constructing others after my own fashion out of his materials ; which, with a spirit of imitation as innocently mischievous as a monkey, I used to purloin for the purpose the moment his back was turned, mixing martin's fur and otter's fur, and dipping my little fingers amongst brown and red hackles, with an audacity that would have tried the patience of Job. How Will's held out I cannot imagine ! but he never got farther than a very earnest supplication that I would give over helping him, a deprecation of my assistance, a " pray don't dear Miss !" that on remembering the provocation seems to me a forbearance surpassing that of Grisildis. What is the desertion of a good-for-nothing husband, and even the cooking his second wedding dinner, (so I believe the story runs,) compared to seeing an elf of four years old mixing and oversetting the thousand and one materials of fly-making ! Old Chaucer hath made the most of it, but in point of patience Grisildis was nothing to Will Skinner.

And yet, to do myself justice, my intentions towards my friend the fly-maker, were perfectly friendly. Mischievous as I undoubtedly was, I did not intend to do mischief. If I filched *from* him, I filched *for* him ;

courted the cook for pheasant and partridge feathers ; begged the old jays and black-birds which were hung up in terrorem in the cherry-trees from the gardener ; dragged a great bit of Turkey carpet to the church-yard because I had heard him say that it made good dubbing ; got into a demévé with a peacock in the neighbourhood from seizing a piece of his tail to form the bodies of Will's dragon-flies ; and had an affair with a pig, in an attempt to procure that staple commodity, hog's down. N.B. The hog had the better of that battle ; and but for the intervention of my friend Coe, who seeing the animal in chase of me, ran to the rescue, and pulled him back by the tail, I might have rue'd my attack upon those pig's ears (for behind them grows the commodity in question,) to this very hour.

Besides the torment that I unconsciously gave him, poor Will had not always reason to congratulate himself on the acquaintance of my faithful follower, Coe. He was, as I have said, a dog of great accomplishment and sagacity, and possessed in perfection all the tricks, which boys and servants love so well to teach to this docile and noble race. Now it so happened that our barber, in the general defalcation of wig-wearers at Cranley, retained one constant customer, a wealthy grocer, who had been churchwarden ever since the Bishop's time, and still emulated that regretted prelate in the magnificence of his peruke ; wearing a caxon such

as I have seldom seen on any head, except that of Mr. Fawcett on the stage, and of Dr. Parr off.

Mr. Samuel Saunders, such was the name of our churchwarden, having had the calamity to lose a wife whom he had wedded some forty years before, was, as the talk went, paying his addresses to pretty Jenny Wren, the bar-maid at the Swan. Samuel was a thick, short, burly person, with a red nose, a red waistcoat, and a cinnamon-coloured coat, altogether a very proper wearer of the buzz wig. If all the men in Cranley could have been ranged in a row, the wig would have been assigned to him, in right of look and demeanour, just as the hats in one corner of Hogarth's print, *The Election Ball*, can be put each on the proper head without difficulty. The man and the wig matched each other. Now Jenny Wren was no match for either. She was a pretty, airy, jaunty girl, with a merry hazel eye, a ready smile, and a nimble tongue, the arrantest flirt in Cranley, talking to every beau in the parish, but listening only to tall Thomas, our handsome groom.

An ill match for Samuel Saunders at sixty, or for Samuel Saunders's wig, was the pretty coquette Jenny Wren at eighteen ! The disparity was painful to think of. But it was the old story. Samuel was wealthy and Jenny poor ; and uncles, aunts, friends and cousins coaxed and remonstrated ; and poor Jenny pouted and cried, and vowed fifty times a day that she would not

marry him if he were fifty times as rich ; till, at length, worn out by importunity, exhausted by the violence of her own opposition, offended by the supineness of her favourite lover, and perhaps a little moved by the splendour of the churchwarden's presents, she began to relent, and finally consented to the union.

The match was now talked of as certain by all the gossips in Cranley,—some had even gone so far as to fix the wedding-day ; when one evening our handsome groom, tall Thomas, poor Jenny's favourite beau, passing by Will Skinner's shop, followed by Coe, saw a new wig of Samuel Saunders's pattern, doubtless the identical wedding wig, reposing in full friz on one of the battered wooden blocks. “ High, Coe !” said Thomas, making a sign with his hand ; and in an instant Coe had sprung over the half-hatch into the vacant shop, had seized the well-powdered perriwig, and in another instant returned with it into the street, and followed Thomas, wig in mouth, into the little bar at the Swan, where sate Mr. Samuel Saunders, making love to Jenny Wren.

The sudden apparition of his wig, borne in so unexpected a manner, wholly discomfited the unlucky suitor and even dumb-founded his fair mistress. “ High, Coe ! high !” repeated Thomas, and, at the word, Coe, letting drop the first caxon, sprang upon that living block, Samuel Saunders's noddle, snatched off the other wig, and deposited both his trophies at Jenny's feet !—

a catastrophe, which was followed in less than a month by the marriage of the handsome groom and the pretty bar-maid ; for the churchwarden, who had withstood all other rebuffs, was driven for ever from the field by the peals of laughter, which, after the first surprise was over, burst irrepressibly from both the lovers. In less than a month they were married ; and Will. Skinner and Coe, who had hitherto avoided each other by mutual consent, met as guests at the wedding-dinner ; and through the good offices of the bridegroom, were completely and permanently reconciled ; Coe's consciousness being far more difficult to conquer than the short-lived anger of the most placable of barbers.

HAY-CARRYING.

AT one end of the cluster of cottages, and cottage-like houses, which formed the little street of Hilton Cross—a pretty but secluded village, a few miles to the south,—stood the shop of Judith Kent, widow, “ Licensed”—as the legend imported, “ to vend tea, coffee, tobacco, and snuff.” Tea, coffee, tobacco, and snuff formed, however, but a small part of the multifarious merchandise of Mrs. Kent; whose shop, the only repository of the hamlet, might have seemed an epitome of the wants and luxuries of humble life. In her window, candles, bacon, sugar, mustard, and soap, flourished amidst calicoes, oranges, dolls, ribbons, and gingerbread. Crockeryware was piled on one side of her door-way, Dutch cheese and Irish butter encumbered the other; brooms and brushes rested against the wall; and ropes of onions and bunches of red herrings hung from the ceiling. She sold bread, butcher’s meat, and garden-stuff, on commission; and engrossed, at a word, the whole trade of Hilton Cross.

Notwithstanding this monopoly, the world went ill with poor Judith. She was a mild, pleasant-looking,

middle-aged woman, with a heart too soft for her calling. She could not say, no ! to the poor creatures who came to her on a Saturday night, to seek bread for their children, however deep they might already be in her debt, or however certain it was, that their husbands were, at that moment, spending, at the Checquers or the Four Horse-shoes, the money that should have supported their wives and families ; for in this village, as in others, there were two flourishing ale-houses, although but one ill-accustomed shop — “ but one halfpenny-worth of bread to this intolerable deal of sack !”

She could not say, no ! as a prudent woman might have said ; and, accordingly, half the poor people in the parish might be found on her books, whilst she herself was gradually getting in arrears with her baker, her grocer, and her landlord. Her family consisted of two children : Mary, a pretty, fair-haired, smiling lass, of twelve or thirteen, and Robert, a fine youth, nearly ten years older, who worked in the gardens of a neighbouring gentleman. Robert, conscious that his mother’s was no gainful trade, often pressed her to give up business, sell off her stock, relinquish her house, and depend on his labour for her support ; but of this she would not hear.

Many motives mingled in her determination : a generous reluctance to burthen her dutiful son with her maintenance,—a natural fear of losing *caste* among her

neighbours,—a strong love of the house which, for five and twenty years, had been her home,—a vague hope, that times would mend and all come right again, (wiser persons than Mrs. Kent have lulled reason to sleep, with such an opiate !)—and, above all, a want of courage, to look her difficulties fairly in the face. Besides she liked her occupation,—it's petty consequence, it's bustle, and it's gossipry ; and she had a sense of gain in the small peddling bargains,—the pennyworths of needles, and balls of cotton, and rows of pins, and yards of tape, which she was accustomed to vend for ready money, that overbalanced, for the moment, her losses and her debts ; so that, in spite of her son's presages and warnings, the shop continued in full activity.

In addition to his forebodings respecting his mother, Robert had another misfortune ;—the poor youth was in love.

About a quarter of a mile down the shady lane, which ran by one side of Mrs. Kent's dwelling, was the pretty farm-house, orchard, and homestead of Farmer Bell, whose eldest daughter Susan,—the beauty of the parish —was the object of a passion, almost amounting to idolatry. And in good sooth, Susan Bell was well fitted to inspire such a passion. Besides a light graceful figure, moulded with the exactest symmetry, she had a smiling, innocent countenance, a complexion coloured like the brilliant blossoms of the balsam, and hair of a shining

golden brown, like the fruit of the horse-chesnut. Her speech was at once modest and playful, her temper sweet, and her heart tender. She loved Robert dearly, although he often gave her cause to wish, that she loved him not; for Robert was subject to the intermitting fever, called jealousy, causelessly—as he himself would declare, when a remission of the disease gave room for his natural sense to act—causelessly and penitently, but still pertinaciously jealous.

I have said that he was a fine young man, tall, dark, and slender; I should add, that he was a good son, a kind brother, a pattern of sobriety and industry, and possessed of talent and acquirement far beyond his station. But there was about him an ardour, a vigour, a fiery restlessness, commonly held proper to the natives of the south of Europe, but which may be found sometimes amongst our own peasantry; all his pursuits, whether of sport or labour, took the form of passion. At ten years old, he had far outstripped his fellow-pupils at the Foundation School, to which, through the kindness of the 'squire of the parish, his mother had been enabled to send him;—at eighteen, he was the best cricketer, the best flute-player, the best bell-ringer, and the best gardener in the county; and some odd volumes of Shakespeare having come into his possession, there was some danger at twenty of his turning out a dramatic poet, had not the kind discouragement of his

master, to whom some of his early scenes were shewn by his patron and admirer, the head gardener, acted as a salutary check. Indeed, so strong at one time was the poetical *fury*, that such a catastrophe as an entire play might, probably, have ensued, notwithstanding Mr. Lescombe's judicious warnings, had not love, the master-passion, fallen, about this time, in poor Robert's way, and engrossed all the ardour of his ardent temperament.

The beauty and playfulness of his mistress, whilst they enchanted his fancy, kept the jealous irritability of his nature in perpetual alarm. He suspected a lover in every man who approached her ; and the firm refusal of her father to sanction their union, till her impudent wooer was a little more forward in the world, completed his disquiet. Affairs were in this posture, when a new personage arrived at Hilton Cross.

In addition to her other ways and means, Mrs. Kent tried to lessen her rent by letting lodgings, and the neat, quiet, elderly gentlewoman, the widow of a long-deceased rector, who had occupied her rooms ever since Robert was born, being at last gathered to her fathers, an advertisement of “ pleasant apartments to let, in the airy village of Hilton Cross,” appeared in the county paper. This announcement was as true, as if it had not formed an advertisement in a country newspaper. Very airy was the pretty village of Hilton Cross—with its breezy uplands, and its open common, dotted, at it were, with

cottages and clumps of trees; and very pleasant were Mrs. Kent's apartments, for those who had sufficient taste to appreciate their rustic simplicity, and sufficient humility to overlook their smallness. - The little chamber glittering with whiteness; its snowy dimity bed, and, "fresh sheets smelling of lavender," the sitting room, a thought larger, carpeted with India matting, its shining cane-chairs, and its bright casement wreathed, on one side, by a luxuriant jessamine, on the other by the tall cluster musk-rose sending its bunches of odorous blossoms into the very window; the little flower-court underneath, full of holly-oaks, cloves, and dahlias, and the large sloping meadow beyond, leading up to Farmer Bell's tall irregular house, half-covered with a flaunting vine; his barns, and ricks, and orchard; - all this formed an apartment too tempting to remain long untenanted, in the bright month of August: accordingly, it was almost immediately engaged by a gentleman in black, who walked over, one fair morning, paid ten pounds as a deposit, sent for his trunk from the next town, and took possession on the instant.

Her new inmate, who, without positively declining to give his name, had, yet, contrived to evade all the questions Mrs. Kent could devise, proved a perpetual source of astonishment, both to herself and her neighbours.

He was a well-made, little man, near upon forty; with considerable terseness of feature, a forehead of great

power, whose effect was increased by a slight baldness on the top of the head, and an eye like a falcon. Such an eye! It seemed to go through you—to strike all that it looked upon, like a *coup-de-soleil*. Luckily, the stranger was so merciful as, generally, to wear spectacles; under cover of which those terrible eyes might see, and be seen, without danger.

His habits were as peculiar as his appearance. He was moderate, and rather fanciful, in his diet; drank nothing but water, or strong coffee, made, as Mrs. Kent observed, very wastefully; and had, as she also remarked, a great number of heathenish-looking books scattered about the apartment—Lord Berners's *Froissart*, for instance, Sir Thomas Brown's *Urn Burial*, the *Baskerville Ariosto*,—Goethe's *Faust*,—a Spanish *Don Quixote*—and an interleaved *Philoctetes*, full of outline drawings. The greater part of his time was spent out of doors.—He would, even, ramble away, for three or four days together, with no other companion than a boy, hired in the village to carry what Mrs. Kent denominated his odds and ends; which odds and ends consisted, for the most part, of an angling rod and a sketching apparatus—our incognito being, as my readers have, by this time, probably discovered, no other than an artist, on his summer progress.

Robert speedily understood the stranger, and was delighted with the opportunity of approaching so gifted

a person; although he contemplated, with a degree of generous envy, which a king's regalia would have failed to excite in his bosom, those *chef d'œuvres* of all nations, which were to him as "sealed books," and the pencils, whose power seemed to him little less than creative. He redoubled his industry in the garden, that he might, conscientiously, devote hours and half-hours, to pointing out the deep pools and shallow eddies of their romantic stream, where he knew, from experience (for Robert, amongst his other accomplishments, was no mean "brother of the angle,") that fish were likely to be found; and, better still, he loved to lead to the haunts of his childhood, the wild bosky dells, and the sunny ends of lanes, where a sudden turn in the track, an overhanging tree, an old gate, a cottage chimney, and a group of cattle or children, had, sometimes, formed a picture, on which his mind had fed for hours. It was Robert's chief pleasure to entice his lodger to scenes such as these, and to see his own visions growing into reality, under the glowing pencil of the artist; and he, in his turn, would admire, and marvel at, the natural feeling of the beautiful, which could lead an un instructed country-youth instinctively to the very elements of the picturesque. A general agreement of taste had brought about a degree of association unusual between persons so different in rank: a particular instance of this accordance dissolved the intimacy.

Robert had been, for above a fortnight, more than commonly busy in Mr. Lescombe's gardens and hot-houses, so busy that he even slept at the hall; the stranger, on the other hand, had been, during the same period, shut up, painting, in the little parlour. At last, they met; and the artist invited his young friend to look at the picture, which had engaged him during his absence. On walking into the room he saw on the easel, a picture in oils, almost finished. The style was of that delightful kind, which combines figures with landscape, the subject was Hay-carrying; and the scene, that very sloping meadow,—crowned by Farmer Bell's tall irregular house, its vine-wreathed porch, and chimneys, the great walnut-tree before the door, the orchard and the homestead—which formed the actual prospect from the windows before them. In the foreground was a waggon piled with hay, surrounded by the Farmer and his fine family,—some pitching, some loading, some raking after, all intent on their pleasant business. The only disengaged persons in the field were young Mary Kent and Harry Bell, an urchin of four years old, who rode on her knee on the top of the waggon, crowned and wreathed with garlands of vine-leaves, and bind-weed, and poppies, and corn-flowers. In the front, looking up at Mary Kent, and her little brother, and playfully tossing to them the lock of hay which she had gathered on her rake, stood Susan Bell,

her head thrown back, her bonnet half off, her light and lovely figure shewn, in all its grace, by the pretty attitude and the short cool dress ; while her sweet face, glowing with youth and beauty, had a smile playing over it, like a sunbeam. The boy was nodding and laughing to her, and seemed longing—as well he might—to escape from his flowery bondage, and jump into her arms. Never had poet framed a lovelier image of rural beauty ! Never had painter more felicitously realised his conception !

" Well, Robert !" exclaimed our artist, a little impatient of the continued silence, and missing the expected praise, " Well !" but still Robert spoke not. " Don't you think it a good subject ?" continued the man of the easel, " I was sitting at the window, reading Froissart, whilst they were carrying the after-crop, and by good luck happened to look up, just as they had arranged themselves into this very groupe, and as the evening sun came slanting, exactly as it does now, across the meadow ; so I dashed in the sketch instantly, got Mary to sit to me,—and a very pretty nymph-like figure she makes—dressed the boy with flowers, just as he was decked out for the harvest home—the rogue is, really, a fit model for a Cupid ; they are a glorious family !—and persuaded Susan—" at that name, Robert, unable to controul himself longer, rushed out of the room, leaving the astonished painter in the full belief that his senses had forsaken him.

The unhappy lover, agonized by jealousy, pursued his way to the farm. He had, hitherto, contrived, although without confessing his motive, even to himself, to keep his friend and his mistress asunder. He had no fears of her virtue, or of his honour ; but, to Robert's romantic simplicity, it seemed that no one could gaze on Susan without feeling ardent love, and that such a man as the artist could never love in vain. Besides, in the conversations which they had held together, he had dwelt on beauty and simplicity, as the most attractive points of female character :—Robert had felt, as he spoke, that Susan was the very being whom he described, and had congratulated himself that they were, still, unacquainted. But now, they had met ; he had seen, he had studied, had transferred to canvass that matchless beauty ; had conquered the timidity which, to Robert had, always, seemed unconquerable ; had won her to admit his gaze, had tamed that shyest, coyest dove ; had become familiar with that sweetest face, and that dearest form ;—Oh ! the very thought was agony !

In this mood, he arrived at the farm ; and there, working at her needle under the vine-wreathed porch, with the evening sun shining full upon her, and her little brother playing at her feet, sate his own Susan. She heard his rapid step, and advanced to meet him with a smile and a blush of delight, just the smile and blush of the picture. At such a moment, they in-

creased his misery ; he repulsed her offered hand, and poured forth a torrent of questions on the subject which possessed his mind. Her innocent answers were fuel to his frenzy :—“ The picture ! had he seen the picture ? and was it not pretty ? much too pretty, she thought, but every body called it like ! and Mary and Harry—was not he pleased with them ? What a wonderful thing it was to make a bit of canvass so like living creatures ! and what a wonderful man the strange gentleman was ! she had been afraid of him, at first—sadly afraid of those two bright eyes—and so had Harry :—poor Harry had cried ! but he was so merry and so kind, that neither of them minded sitting to him, now ! And she was so glad that Robert had seen the picture ! she had so wanted him to see it ! it was too pretty, to be sure,—but, then, Robert would not mind that. She had told the gentleman”—“ Go to the gentleman, now,” interrupted Robert, “ and tell him that I relinquish you ! It will be welcome news ! Go to him, Susan ! your heart is with him. Go to him I say !” and, throwing from him, with a bitter laugh, the frightened and weeping girl, who had laid her trembling hand on his arm, to detain him, he darted from the door, and returned to his old quarters at the hall.

Another fortnight passed, and Robert still kept aloof from his family and his home. His mother and sisters, indeed, occasionally saw him ; and sad accounts had

poor little Mary to give to her friend Susan, of Robert's ill looks and worse spirits. And Susan listened, and said she did not care ; and burst into a passion of tears, and said she was very happy ; and vowed never to speak to him again, and desired Mary never to mention her to him, or him to her, and then asked her a hundred questions respecting his looks and his words, and his illness, and charged her with a thousand tender messages, which, in the next breath, she withdrew. And Mary, too young to understand the inconsistencies of love, pitied and comforted, and thought it " passing strange."

In the mean time misfortunes of a different kind were gathering round Mrs. Kent. The meal-man and baker, whose bread she vended, her kindest friend and largest creditor, died, leaving his affairs in the hands of an attorney of the next town, the pest and terror of the neighbourhood ; and, on the same day, she received two letters from this formidable lawyer,—one on account of his dead client, the baker, the other in behalf of his living client, the grocer, who ranked next amongst her creditors, both threatening that if their respective claims were not liquidated, on or before a certain day, proceedings would be commenced against her, forthwith.

It is in such a situation that woman most feels her helplessness,—especially that forlorn creature whom the

common people, adopting the pathetic language of Scripture, designate by the expressive phrase, “a lone woman!” Poor Judith sate down to cry, in powerless sorrow and vain self-pity. She opened, indeed, her hopeless day-book,—but she knew too well, that her debtors could not pay. She had no one to consult,—for her lodger, in whose general cleverness she had great confidence, had been absent, on one of his excursions, almost as long as her son,—and time pressed upon her,—for the letters, sent with the usual indirectness of country conveyance, originally given to the carrier, confided by the carrier to the butterman, carried on by the butterman to the next village, left for three days at a public-house, and, finally, delivered at Hilton Cross, by a return post-boy, had been nearly a week on the road. Saturday was the day fixed for payment, and this was Friday night! and Michaelmas and rent-day were approaching! and unable even to look at this accumulation of misery, poor Judith laid her head on her fruitless accompt-book, and sobbed aloud!

It was with a strangely mingled feeling of comfort in such a son, and sorrow so to grieve him, that she heard Robert's voice at her side, asking, tenderly, what ailed her? She put the letters into his hands; and he, long prepared for the blow, soothed and cheered her. “All must be given up,” he said, “and he would go with her the next day, to make over the whole property. Let

us pay, as far as our means go, mother," pursued he, "and do not fear but, some day or other, we shall be able to discharge all our debts. God will speed an honest purpose. In the mean time, Mr. Lescombe will give us a cottage—I know he will—and I shall work for you and Mary. It will be something to live for—something worth living for. Be comforted, dear mother!" He stooped, as he said this, and kissed her; and when he arose, he saw Susan standing opposite to him, and behind her, the stranger. They had entered separately, during the conversation between the mother and son, and Susan was still unconscious of the artist's presence.

She stood, in great agitation, pressing Mary's hand, (from whom she had heard the story,) and immediately began questioning Mrs. Kent, as to the extent of the calamity. "She had twenty pounds of her own, that her grandmother had left her;—but a hundred! did they want a whole hundred? and would they send Mrs. Kent to prison? and sell her goods? and turn Mary out of doors? and Robert—Oh! how ill Robert looked!—It would kill Robert!—Oh!" continued Susan, wringing her hands, "I would sell myself for a bondwoman, I would be like a negro-slave for one hundred pounds!" "Would you?" said the stranger advancing, suddenly, from the door, and producing two bank bills; "would you? well! we will strike a bargain. I will give you two hundred pounds for this little

hand, only this little hand!"—"What do you mean, Sir?" exclaimed Mrs. Kent, "what can you mean?" "Nothing but what is fair and honourable," returned her lodger; "let Susan promise to meet me at church; to-morrow, and here are two hundred pounds to dispose of, at her pleasure, to-night." "Susan! my dear Susan!"—"Let her alone, mother!" interrupted Robert; "she must choose for herself!" and, for a few moments, there was a dead silence. Robert stood, leaning against the wall, pale as marble, his eyes cast down, and his lips compressed, in a state of forced composure. Mrs. Kent, her head turning, now towards the bank-notes, and now towards her son, was in a state of restless and uncontrollable instability; Mary clung, crying, about her mother; and Susan, her colour varying, and her lips quivering, sate, unconsciously, twisting and untwisting the bank-notes in her hand.

"Well, Susan!" said the artist, who had remained in tranquil expectation, surveying the groupe with his falcon eye. "Well, Susan! have you determined?"—The colour rose to her temples, and she answered firmly, "Yes, Sir! be pleased to take back the notes. I love nobody but Robert, and Robert loves me dearly, dearly! I know he does! Oh Mrs. Kent! you would not have me vex Robert, your own dear son, and he so ill;—would you? Let them take these things! they never can be so cruel as to put you in prison—you, who were

always so kind to every body ; and he will work for you ! and I will work for you ! Never mind being poor ! better any thing than be false-hearted to my Robert ! " " God for ever bless you, my Susan ! " " God bless you, my dear child ! " burst, at once, from Robert and his mother, as they, alternately, folded her in their arms.

" Pray take the notes, Sir," repeated Susan, after a short interval. " No ! that I will not do," replied the stranger, smiling. " The notes shall be your's,—are your's—and what is more, on my own conditions ! Meet me at church to-morrow morning, and I shall have the pleasure of bestowing this pretty hand, as I always intended, on my good friend, Robert, here. I have a wife of my own at home, my dear, whom I would not exchange, even for you ; and I am quite rich enough to afford myself the luxury of making you happy. Besides, you have a claim to the money. These very bank-notes were gained by that sweet face ! Your friend, Mr. Lescombe, Robert, has purchased the hay-carrying ! We have had a good deal of talk about you, and I am quite certain that he will provide for you all. No thanks !" continued he, interrupting something that Robert was going to say,— " No thanks ! no apologies ! I won't hear a word. Meet me at church to-morrow ! but, remember, young man, no more jealousy !" and, followed by a glance from Susan, of which Robert might have been jealous, the artist left the shop.

OUR MAYING.

As party produces party, and festival brings forth festival in higher life, so one scene of rural festivity is pretty sure to be followed by another. The boys' cricket-match at Whitsuntide, which was won most triumphantly by our parish, and luckily passed off without giving cause for a coroner's inquest, or indeed without injury of any sort, except the demolition of Amos Stone's new straw-hat, the crown of which (Amos's head being fortunately at a distance), was fairly struck out by the cricket-ball; this match produced one between our eleven and the players of the neighbouring hamlet of Whitley; and being patronized by the young lord of the manor and several of the gentry round, and followed by jumping in sacks, riding donkey-races, grinning through horse-collars, and other diversions more renowned for their antiquity than their elegance, gave such general satisfaction, that it was resolved to hold a Maying in full form in Whitley-wood.

Now this wood of ours happens to be a common of

twenty acres, with three trees on it, and the Maying was fixed to be held between bay-time and harvest; but “what’s in a name?” Whitley-wood is a beautiful piece of green sward, surrounded on three sides by fields, and farm-houses, and cottages, and woody uplands, and on the other by a fine park; and the May-house was erected, and the May-games held in the beginning of July; the very season of leaves and roses, when the days are at the longest, and the weather at the finest, and the whole world is longing to get out of doors. Moreover, the whole festival was aided, not impeded, by the gentlemen amateurs, headed by that very genial person, our young lord of the manor; whilst the business part of the affair was confided to the well-known diligence, zeal, activity, and intelligence of that most popular of village landlords, mine host of the Rose. How could a Maying fail under such auspices? Every body expected more sunshine and more fun, more flowers and more laughing, than ever was known at a rustic merry-making—and really, considering the manner in which expectation had been raised, the quantity of disappointment has been astonishingly small.

Landlord Sims, the master of the revels, and our very good neighbour, is a portly, bustling man, of five-and-forty, or thereabout, with a hale, jovial visage, a merry eye, a pleasant smile, and a general air of good-fellowship. This last qualification, whilst it serves greatly

to recommend his ale, is apt to mislead superficial observers, who generally account him a sort of slenderer Boniface, and imagine that, like that renowned hero of the spiggot, Master Sims eats, drinks, and sleeps on his own anno domini. They were never more mistaken in their lives ; no soberer man than Master Sims within twenty miles ! Except for the good of the house, he no more thinks of drinking beer, than a grocer of eating figs. To be sure when the jug lags he will take a hearty pull, just by way of example, and to set the good ale a going. But, in general, he trusts to subtler and more delicate modes of quickening its circulation. A good song, a good story, a merry jest, a hearty laugh, and a most winning habit of assentation ; these are his implements. There is not a better companion, or a more judicious listener in the county. His pliability is astonishing. He shall say yes to twenty different opinions on the same subject, within the hour ; and so honest and cordial does his agreement seem, that no one of his customers, whether drunk or sober, ever dreams of doubting his sincerity. The hottest conflict of politics never puzzles him : Whig or Tory, he is both, or either—"the happy Mercutio, that curses both houses." Add to this gift of conformity, a cheerful, easy temper, an alacrity of attention, a zealous desire to please, which gives to his duties, as a landlord, all the grace of hospitality, and a perpetual civility and kindness, even when he has no

thing to gain by them ; and no one can wonder at Master Sims's popularity.

After his good wife's death, this popularity began to extend itself in a remarkable manner amongst the females of the neighbourhood ; smitten with his portly person, his smooth, oily manner, and a certain soft, earnest, whispering voice, which he generally assumes when addressing one of the fairer sex, and which seems to make his very "how d'ye do" confidential and complimentary. Moreover, it was thought that the good landlord was well to do in the world, and though Betsy and Letty were good little girls, quick, civil, and active, yet, poor things, what could such young girls know of a house like the Rose ? All would go to rack and ruin without the eye of a mistress ! Master Sims must look out for a wife. So thought the whole female world, and, apparently, Master Sims began to think so himself.

The first fair one to whom his attention was directed, was a rosy, pretty widow, a pastry-cook of the next town, who arrived in our village on a visit to her cousin, the baker, for the purpose of giving confectionary lessons to his wife. Nothing was ever so hot as that courtship. During the week that the lady of pie-crust staid, her lover almost lived in the oven. One would have thought that he was learning to make the cream-tarts without pepper, by which Bedreddin Hassan regained his state and his princess. It would be a most suitable match,

as all the parish agreed ; the widow, for as pretty as she was, (and one sha'n't often see a pleasanter, open countenance, or a sweeter smile,) being within ten years as old as her suitor, and having had two husbands already. A most proper and suitable match, said every body ; and when our landlord carried her back to B. in his new-painted green cart, all the village agreed that they were gone to be married, and the ringers were just setting up a peal, when Master Sims returned alone, single, crest-fallen, dejected ; the bells stopped of themselves, and we heard no more of the pretty pastry-cook. For three months after that rebuff, mine host, albeit not addicted to aversions, testified an equal dislike to women and tartlets, widows and plum-cake. Even poor Alice Taylor, whose travelling basket of lollipops and gingerbread he had whilome patronized, was forbidden the house ; and not a bun or a biscuit could be had at the Rose, for love or money.

The fit, however, wore off in time ; and he began again to follow the advice of his neighbours, and to look out for a wife, up street and down ; whilst at each extremity a fair object presented herself, from neither of whom had he the slightest reason to dread a repetition of the repulse which he had experienced from the blooming widow. The down-street lady was a widow also, the portly, comely relict of our drunken village blacksmith, who, in spite of her joy at her first husband's

death, and an old spite at mine host of the Rose, to whose good ale and good company she was wont to ascribe most of the aberrations of the deceased, began to find her shop, her journeymen, and her eight children (six unruly obstreperous pickles of boys, and two tomboys of girls), rather more than a lone woman could manage, and to sigh for a help-mate to ease her of her cares, collect the boys at night, see the girls to school of a morning, break the larger imps of running away to revels and fairs, and the smaller fry of birds-nesting and orchard-robbing, and bear a part in the lectures and chastisements, which she deemed necessary to preserve the young rebels from the bad end which she predicted to them twenty times a day. Master Sims was the co-adjutor on whom she had inwardly pitched ; and, accordingly, she threw out broad hints to that effect, every time she encountered him, which, in the course of her search for boys and girls, who were sure to be missing at school-time and bed-time, happened pretty often : and Mr. Sims was far too gallant and too much in the habit of assenting to listen unmoved ; for really the widow was a fine, tall, comely woman ; and the whispers, and smiles, and hand-pressings, when they happened to meet, were becoming very tender ; and his admonitions and head-shakings, addressed to the young crew (who, nevertheless, all liked him) quite fatherly. This was his down-street flame.

The rival lady was Miss Lydia Day, the carpenter's sister ; a slim, upright maiden, not remarkable for beauty, and not quite so young as she had been, who, on inheriting a small annuity from the mistress with whom she had spent the best of her days, retired to her native village to live on her means. A genteel, demure, quiet personage, was Miss Lydia Day ; much addicted to snuff and green tea, and not averse from a little gentle scandal—for the rest, a good sort of woman, and *un très-bon parti* for Master Sims, who seemed to consider it a profitable speculation, and made love to her whenever she happened to come into his head, which, it must be confessed, was hardly so often as her merits and her annuity deserved. Remiss as he was, he had no lack of encouragement to complain of—for she “to hear would seriously incline,” and put on her best silk, and her best simper, and lighted up her faded complexion into something approaching to a blush, whenever he came to visit her. And this was Master Sims's up-street love.

So stood affairs at the Rose when the day of the Maying arrived ; and the double flirtation, which, however dexterously managed, must have been, sometimes, one would think, rather inconvenient to the inamorato, proved on this occasion extremely useful. Each of the fair ladies contributed her aid to the festival ; Miss Lydia by tying up sentimental garlands for the May-house, and scolding the carpenters into diligence in the

erection of the booths ; the widow by giving her whole bevy of boys and girls a holiday, and turning them loose on the neighbourhood to collect flowers as they could. Very useful auxiliaries were these light foragers ; they scoured the country far and near—irresistible mendicants ! pardonable thieves ! coming to no harm, poor children, except that little George got a black eye in tumbling from the top of an acacia tree at the Park, and that Sam (he's a sad pickle is Sam !) narrowly escaped a horse-whipping from the head gardener at the Hall, who detected a bunch of his new rhododendron, the only plant in the county, forming the very crown and centre of the May-pole. Little harm did they do, poor children, with all their pilfery : and when they returned, covered with their flowery loads, like the May-day figure called “ Jack of the Green,” they worked at the garlands and the May-houses, as none but children ever do work, putting all their young life and their untiring spirit of noise and motion into their pleasant labour. Oh, the din of that building ! Talk of the Tower of Babel ! that was a quiet piece of masonry compared to the May-house of Whitley-wood, with its walls of leaves and flowers—and its canvass booths at either end for refreshments and musicians. Never was known more joyous note of preparation.

The morning rose more quietly—I had almost said more dully—and promised ill for the *fête*. The sky was

gloomy, the wind cold, and the green filled as slowly as a balloon seems to do when one is watching it. The entertainments of the day were to begin with a cricket-match (two elevens to be chosen on the ground), and the wickets pitched at twelve o'clock precisely. Twelve o'clock came—but no cricketers—except, indeed, some two or three punctual and impatient gentlemen; one o'clock came, and brought no other reinforcement than two or three more of our young Etonians and Wykhamites—less punctual than their precursors, but not a whit less impatient. Very provoking, certainly—but not very uncommon. Your country cricketer, the peasant, the mere rustic, does love, on these occasions, to keep his betters waiting, if only to display his power; and when we consider that it is the one solitary opportunity in which importance can be felt and vanity gratified, we must acknowledge it to be perfectly in human nature that a few airs should be shewn. Accordingly, our best players held aloof. Tom Coper would not come to the ground; Joel Brent came, indeed, but would not play; Samuel Long coquettish—he would and he would not. Very provoking, certainly! Then two young farmers, a tall brother and a short, Hampshire men, cricketers born, whose good-humour and love of the game rendered them sure cards, had been compelled to go on business—the one, ten miles south—the other, fifteen north—that very morning. No playing without the Goddards! No sign of

either of them on the B—— road or the F——. Most intolerably provoking, beyond a doubt! Master Sims tried his best coaxing and his best double X on the recusant players; but all in vain. In short, there was great danger of the match going off altogether; when, about two o'clock, Amos Stone, who was there with the crown of his straw hat sewed in wrong side outward—new thatched, as it were—and who had been set to watch the B—— highway, gave notice that something was coming as tall as the Maypole—which something turning out to be the long Goddard, and his brother approaching at the same moment in the opposite direction, hope, gaiety, and good-humour revived again; and two elevens, including Amos and another urchin of his calibre, were formed on the spot.

I never saw a prettier match. The gentlemen, the Goddards, and the boys being equally divided, the strength and luck of the parties were so well balanced, that it produced quite a neck-and-neck race, won only by two notches. Amos was completely the hero of the day, standing out half of his side, and getting five notches at one hit. His side lost—but so many of his opponents gave him their ribbons (have not I said that Master Sims bestowed a set of ribbons?) that the straw hat was quite covered with purple trophies; and Amos, stalking about the ground, with a shy and awkward vanity, looked with his decorations like the sole conqueror

—the Alexander or Napoleon of the day. The boy did not speak a word; but every now and then he displayed a set of huge white teeth in a grin of inexpressible delight. By far the happiest and proudest personage of that Maying was Amos Stone.

By the time the cricket-match was over, the world began to be gay at Whitley-wood. Carts and gigs, and horses and carriages, and people of all sorts, arrived from all quarters; and, lastly, “the blessed sun himself” made his appearance, adding a triple lustre to the scene. Fiddlers, ballad-singers, cake-baskets—Punch—Master Frost, crying cherries—a Frenchman with dancing dogs—a Bavarian woman selling brooms—half-a-dozen stalls with fruit and frippery—and twenty noisy games of quoits, and bowls, and ninepins—boys throwing at boxes—girls playing at ball—gave to the assemblage the bustle, clatter, and gaiety of a Dutch fair, as one sees it in Teniers’ pictures. Plenty of drinking and smoking on the green—plenty of eating in the booths: the gentlemen cricketers, at one end, dining off a round of beef, which made the table totter—the players, at the other, supping off a gammon of bacon—Amos Stone crammed at both—and Landlord Sims bustling every where with an activity that seemed to confer upon him the gift of ubiquity, assisted by the little light-footed maidens, his daughters, all smiles and curtsies, and by a pretty black-eyed young woman—name unknown—with

whom, even in the midst of his hurry, he found time, as it seemed to me, for a little philandering. What would the widow and Miss Lydia have said? But they remained in happy ignorance—the one drinking tea in most decorous primness in a distant marquée, disliking to mingle with so mixed an assembly,—the other in full chase after the most unlucky of all her urchins, the boy called Sam, who had gotten into a *démélée* with a showman, in consequence of mimicking the wooden gentleman Punch, and his wife Judy—thus, as the showman observed, bringing his exhibition into disrepute.

Meanwhile, the band struck up in the May-house, and the dance, after a little demur, was fairly set afloat—an honest English country dance—(there had been some danger of waltzing and quadrilling)—with ladies and gentlemen at the top, and country lads and lasses at the bottom; a happy mixture of cordial kindness on the one hand, and pleased respect on the other. It was droll though to see the beplumed and besflowered French hats, the silks and the furbelows sailing and rustling amidst the straw bonnets and cotton gowns of the humbler dancers; and not less so to catch a glimpse of the little lame clerk, shabbier than ever, peeping through the canvass opening of the booth, with a grin of ineffable delight, over the shoulder of our vicar's pretty wife. Really, considering that Mabel Green and Jem Tanner were standing together at that moment at the top of the

set, so deeply engaged in making love that they forgot when they ought to begin, and that the little clerk must have seen them, I cannot help taking his grin for a favourable omen to those faithful lovers.

Well, the dance finished, the sun went down, and we departed. The Maying is over, the booths carried away, and the May-house demolished. Every thing has fallen into its old position, except the love affairs of Landlord Sims. The pretty lass with the black eyes, who first made her appearance at Whitley-wood, is actually staying at the Rose Inn, on a visit to his daughters ; and the village talk goes that she is to be the mistress of that thriving hostelry, and the wife of its master ; and both her rivals are jealous, after their several fashions—the widow in the tantrums, the maiden in the dumps. Nobody knows exactly who the black-eyed damsel may be, —but she's young, and pretty, and civil, and modest ; and, without intending to deprecate the merits of either of her competitors, I cannot help thinking that our good neighbour has shewn his taste.

AN ADMIRAL ON SHORE.

I DO not know any moment in which the two undelightful truisms which we are all so ready to admit and to run away from, the quick progress of time and the instability of human events, are brought before us with a more uncomfortable consciousness than that of visiting, after a long absence, a house with whose former inhabitants we had been on terms of intimacy. The feeling is still more unpleasant when it comes to us unexpectedly and finds us unprepared, as has happened to me to-day.

A friend requested me this morning to accompany her to call on her little girl, whom she had recently placed at the Belvidere, a new and celebrated boarding-school—I beg pardon!—establishment for young ladies, about ten miles off. We set out accordingly, and, my friend being a sort of person in whose company one is apt to think little of any thing but herself, had proceeded to the very gate of the Belvidere before I had at all recollect ed the road we were travelling, when in our momentary stop at the entrance of the lawn, I at once re-

cognized the large substantial mansion, surrounded by magnificent oaks and elms, whose shadow lay broad and heavy on the grass in the bright sun of August ; the copse-like shrubbery, which sunk with a pretty natural wildness to a dark clear pool, the ha ha, which parted the pleasure-ground from the open common, and the beautiful country which lay like a panorama beyond—in a word, I knew at a glance, in spite of the disguise of its new appellation, the White House at Hannonby, where ten years ago I had so often visited my good old friend Admiral Floyd.

The place had undergone other transmogrifications besides its change of name ; in particular, it had gained a few prettinesses and had lost much tidiness. A new rustic bench, a green-house, and a verandah, may be laid to the former score ; a torn book left littering on the seat, a broken swing dangling from the trees, a skipping-rope on the grass, and a straw bonnet on a rose bush, to the latter ; besides which, the lawn which, under the naval reign, had been kept almost as smooth as water, was now in complete neglect, the turf in some places growing into grass, in others trodden quite bare by the continual movement of little rapid feet ; leaves lay under the trees ; weeds were on the gravel ; and dust upon the steps. And in two or three chosen spots small fairy gardens had been cribbed from the shrubberies, where seedy mignonette and languishing sweet

peas, and myrtles over-watered, and geraniums, trained as never geraniums were trained before, gave manifest tokens of youthful gardening. None of the inhabitants were visible, but it was evidently a place gay and busy with children, devoted to their sports and their exercise. As we neared the mansion, the sounds and sights of school-keeping became more obvious. Two or three pianos were jingling in different rooms, a guitar tinkling, and a harp twanging ; a din of childish voices, partly French partly English, issued from one end of the house ; and a foreign-looking figure advanced from the other ; whom, from his silk stockings, his upright carriage, and the boy who followed him carrying his kit, I set down for the dancing-master ; whilst in an upstair apartment were two or three rosy laughing faces, enjoying the pleasure of disobedience in peeping out of window, one of which faces disappeared the moment it caught sight of the carriage, and was in another instant hanging round its mother's neck in the hall. I could not help observing to the governess, who also met us there, that it was quite shocking to think how often disobedience prospers amongst these little people. If Miss Emily had not been peeping out of the window when we drove up to the door, she would have been at least two minutes later in kissing her dear mamma—a remark to which the little girl assented very heartily, and at which her accomplished preceptress tried to look grave.

Leaving Emily with her mother, I sallied forth on the lawn to reconnoitre old scenes and recollect old times. My first visit especially forced itself on my remembrance. It had been made, like this, under the sultry August sun. We then lived within walking distance, and I had been proceeding hither to call on our new neighbours, Admiral and Mrs. Floyd, when a very unaccountable noise on the lawn induced me to pause at the entrance; a moment's observation explained the nature of the sounds. The admiral was shooting wasps with a pocket pistol; a most villainous amusement, as it seemed to me, who am by nature and habit a hater of such poppery, and indeed of all noises which are at once sudden and expected. My first impulse was to run away, and I had actually made some motions towards a retreat, when, struck with the ludicrous nature of the sport, and the folly of being frightened at a sort of squibbery, which even the unusual game (though the admiral was a capital marksman, and seldom failed to knock down his insect) did not seem to regard, I faced about manfully, and contenting myself with putting my hands to my ears to keep out the sound, remained at a very safe distance to survey the scene. There, under the shade of the tall elms, sate the veteran, a little old withered man, very like a pocket pistol himself, brown, succinct, grave, and fiery. He wore an old-fashioned naval uniform of blue, faced with white, which set off

his mahogany countenance, drawn into a thousand deep wrinkles, so that his face was as full of lines as if it had been tattooed, with the full force of contrast. At his side stood a very tall, masculine, large-boned middle-aged woman, something like a man in petticoats, whose face, in spite of a quantity of rouge and a small portion of modest assurance, might still be called handsome, and could never be mistaken for belonging to other than an Irish woman. There was a touch of the brogue in her very look. She, evidently his wife, stood by marking the covies, and enjoying, as it seemed to me, the smell of gunpowder, to which she had the air of being quite as well accustomed as the admiral. A younger lady was watching them at a little distance, apparently as much amused as myself, and far less frightened ; on her advancing to meet me the pistol was put down, and the admiral joined us. This was my first introduction : we were acquainted in a moment ; and before the end of my visit he had shown me all over his house, and told me the whole history of his life and adventures.

In these there was nothing remarkable, excepting their being so entirely of the sea. Some sixty-five years before, he had come into the world in the middle of the British channel, while his mother was taking a little trip from Portsmouth to Plymouth on board her husband's flag-ship (for he, too, had been an admiral), when, rather before he was expected, our admiral was born. This

début fixed his destiny. At twelve years old he went to sea, and had remained there ever since, till now, when an unlucky promotion sent him ashore, and seemed likely to keep him there. I never saw a man so unaffectedly displeased with his own title. He forbade any of his family from calling him by it, and took it as a sort of affront from strangers.

Being, however, on land, his first object was to make his residence as much like a man-of-war as possible, or rather as much like that *beau-idéal* of a habitation his last frigate, the Mermaiden, in which he had by different prizes made above sixty thousand pounds. By that standard his calculations were regulated ; all the furniture of the White House at Hannonby was adapted to the proportions of His Majesty's ship the Mermaiden. The great drawing-room was fitted up exactly on the model of her cabin, and the whole of that spacious and commodious mansion made to resemble, as much as possible, that wonderfully inconvenient abode, the inside of a ship ; every thing crammed into the smallest possible compass ; space most unnecessarily economized, and contrivances devised for all those matters which need no contriving at all. He victualled the house as for an East-India voyage, served out the provisions in rations, and swung the whole family in hammocks.

It will easily be believed that these innovations, in a small village in a midland county, where nineteen-

twentieths of the inhabitants had never seen a piece of water larger than Hannonby great pond, occasioned no small commotion. The poor admiral had his own troubles. At first every living thing about the place rebelled—there was a general mutiny; the very cocks and hens whom he had crammed up in coops in the poultry-yard screamed aloud for liberty; and the pigs, ducks, and geese, equally prisoners, squeaked and gabbed for water; the cows lowed in their stall—the sheep bleated in their pens, the whole live stock of Hannonby was in durance.

The most unmanageable of these complainers were of course the servants: with the men, after a little while, he got on tolerably, sternness and grog (the wind and sun of the fable) conquered them; his staunchest opponents were of the other sex, the whole tribe of housemaids and kitchenmaids abhorred him to a woman, and plagued and thwarted him every hour of the day. He, on his part, returned their aversion with interest; talked of female stupidity, female awkwardness, and female dirt, and threatened to compound an household of the crew of the Mermaiden, that should shame all the twirlers of mops and brandishers of brooms in the county. Especially, he used to vaunt the abilities of a certain Bill Jones, as the best laundress, sempstress, cook, and housemaid in the navy; him he was determined to procure, to keep his refractory household in

some order ; accordingly, he wrote to desire his presence ; and Bill, unable to resist the summons of his old commander, arrived accordingly.

This Avatar, which had been anticipated by the revolted damsels with no small dismay, tended considerably to ameliorate matters. The dreaded major domo turned out to be a smart young sailor, of four or five-and-twenty, with an arch smile, a bright merry eye, and a most knowing nod, by no means insensible to female objurgation or indifferent to female charms. The women of the house, particularly the pretty ones, soon perceived their power ; and as this Admirable Crichton of his Majesty's ship the Mermaiden, had, amongst his other accomplishments, the address completely to govern his master, all was soon in the smoothest track possible. Neither, universal genius though he were, was Bill Jones at all disdainful of female assistance, or averse to the theory of a division of labour. Under his wise direction and discreet patronage, a peace was patched up between the admiral and his rebellious handmaids. A general amnesty was proclaimed, with the solitary exception of an old crone of a she-cook, who had, on some occasion of culinary interference, turned her master out of his own kitchen, and garnished Bill Jones's jacket with an unseemly rag yclept a dish-clout. She was dismissed by mutual consent ; and Sally the kitchenmaid, a pretty black-eyed girl, pro-

moted to the vacant post, which she filled with eminent ability.

Soothed, guided, and humoured by his trusty adherent, and influenced perhaps a little by the force of example and the effect of the land breeze, which he had never breathed so long before, our worthy veteran soon began to shew symptoms of a man of this world. The earth became, so to say, his native element. He took to gardening, to farming, for which Bill Jones had also a taste; set free his prisoners in the *basse-cour*, to the unutterable glorification and crowing of cock and hen, and cackling and gabbling of goose and turkey, and enlarged his own walk from pacing backwards and forwards in the dining-room, followed by his old shipmates, a Newfoundland dog and a tame goat, into a stroll round his own grounds, to the great delight of those faithful attendants. He even talked of going pheasant shooting, bought a hunter, and was only saved from following the fox-hounds by accidentally taking up Peregrine Pickle, which, by a kind of Sortes Virgilianæ, opened on the mischances of Lieutenant Hatchway and Commodore Trunnion in a similar expedition.

After this warning, which he considered as nothing less than providential, he relinquished any attempt at mounting that formidable animal, a horse, but having found his land legs, he was afoot all day long in his farm or his garden, setting people to rights in all quar-

ters, and keeping up the place with the same scrupulous nicety that he was wont to bestow on the planks and rigging of his dear Mermaiden. Amongst the country people, he soon became popular. They liked the testy little gentleman, who dispensed his beer and grog so bountifully, and talked to them so freely. He would have his own way, to be sure, but then he paid for it ; besides, he entered into their tastes and amusements, promoted May-games, revels, and other country sports, patronized dancing-dogs and monkies, and bespoke plays in barns. Above all, he had an exceeding partiality to vagrants, strollers, gipsys, and such like persons ; listened to their tales with a delightful simplicity of belief ; pitied them ; relieved them ; fought their battles at the bench and the vestry, and got into two or three scrapes with constables and magistrates, by the activity of his protection. Only one counterfeit sailor with a sham wooden-leg, he found out at a question, and, by aid of Bill Jones, ducked in the horse-pond, for an impostor, till the unlucky wretch, who was, as the worthy seaman suspected, totally unused to the water, a thorough land-lubber, was nearly drowned ; an adventure which turned out the luckiest of his life, he having carried his case to an attorney, who forced the admiral to pay fifty pounds for the exploit.

Our good veteran was equally popular amongst the gentry of the neighbourhood. His own hospitality was

irresistible, and his frankness and simplicity, mixed with a sort of petulant vivacity, combined to make him a most welcome relief to the dulness of a country dinner party. He enjoyed society extremely, and even had a spare bed erected for company ; moved thereunto by an accident which befel the fat Rector of Kinton, who having unfortunately consented to sleep at Hannonby one wet night, had alarmed the whole house, and nearly broken his own neck, by a fall from his hammock. The admiral would have put up twenty spare beds, if he could have been sure of filling them, for besides his natural sociability, he was, it must be confessed, in spite of his farming, and gardening, and keeping a log-book, a good deal at a loss how to fill up his time. His reading was none of the most extensive : Robinson Crusoe, the Naval Chronicle, Southey's admirable Life of Nelson, and Smollet's Novels, formed the greater part of his library ; and for other books he cared little ; though he liked well enough to pore over maps and charts, and to look at modern voyages, especially if written by landsmen or ladies ; and his remarks on those occasions often displayed a talent for criticism, which, under different circumstances, might have ripened into a very considerable reviewer.

For the rest, he was a most kind and excellent person, although a little testy and not a little absolute ; and a capital disciplinarian, although addicted to the

reverse sins of making other people tipsy whilst he kept himself sober, and of sending forth oaths in vollies whilst he suffered none other to swear. He had besides a few prejudices incident to his condition—loved his country to the point of hating all the rest of the world, especially the French ; and regarded his own profession with a pride which made him intolerant of every other. To the army he had an intense and growing hatred, much augmented since victory upon victory had deprived him of the comfortable feeling of scorn. The battle of Waterloo fairly posed him. “ To be sure to have drubbed the French was a fine thing—a very fine thing—no denying that ! but why not have fought out the quarrel by sea ?”

I made no mention of Mrs. Floyd in enumerating the admiral’s domestic arrangements, because, sooth to say, no one could have less concern in them than that good lady. She had not been Mrs. Floyd for five-and-twenty years without thoroughly understanding her husband’s despotic humour, and her own light and happy temper enabled her to conform to it without the slightest appearance of reluctance or discontent. She liked to be managed—it saved her trouble. She turned out to be Irish, as I had suspected. The admiral, who had reached the age of forty without betraying the slightest symptom of matrimony, had, during a sojourn in Cork Harbour, fallen in love with her, then a buxom widow,

and married her in something less than three weeks after their acquaintance began, chiefly moved to that unexpected proceeding by the firmness with which she bore a salute to the Lord Lieutenant which threw half the ladies on board into hysterics.

Mrs. Floyd was indeed as gallant a woman as ever stood fire. Her first husband had been an officer in the army, and she had followed the camp during two campaigns ; had been in one battle and several skirmishes, and had been taken and retaken with the carriages and baggage without betraying the slightest symptom of fear. Her naval career did not shame her military reputation. She lived chiefly on board, adopted sea phrases and sea customs, and but for the petticoat might have passed for a sailor herself.

And of all the sailors that ever lived, she was the merriest, the most generous, the most unselfish ; the very kindest of that kindest race ! There was no getting away from her hearty hospitality, no escaping her prodigality of presents. It was dangerous to praise or even to approve of any thing belonging to herself in her hearing ; if it had been the carpet under her feet or the shawl on her shoulders, either would instantly have been stripped off to offer. Then her exquisite good humour ! Coarse and boisterous she certainly was, and terribly Irish ; but the severest stickler for female decorum, the nicest critic of female manners, would have

been disarmed by the contagion of Mrs. Floyd's good-humour.

My chief friend and favourite of the family was however one who hardly seemed to belong to it—Anne, the eldest daughter. I liked her even better than I did her father and mother, although for very different qualities. She was “inland bred,” and combined in herself sufficient self-possession and knowledge of the world, of literature, and of society, to have set up the whole house, provided it had been possible to supply their deficiency from her superabundance; she was three or four-and-twenty, too, past the age of mere young-ladyism, and entirely unaccomplished, if she could be called so, who joined to the most elegant manners a highly cultivated understanding and a remarkable talent for conversation. Nothing could exceed the fascination of her delicate and poignant raillery, her voice and smile were so sweet, and her wit so light and glancing. She had the still rarer merit of being either entirely free from vanity, or of keeping it in such good order, that it never appeared in look or word. Conversation, much as she excelled in it, was not necessary to her, as it is to most eminent talkers. I think she enjoyed quiet observation, full as much, if not more; and at such times there was something of good-humoured malice in her bright hazel eye, that spoke more than she ever allowed her tongue to utter. Her father's odd ways, for instance, and her

mother's odd speeches, and her sister's lack-a-daisicalness, amused her rather more than they ought to have done ; but she had never lived with them, having been brought up by an aunt who had recently died leaving her a splendid fortune ; and even now that she had come to reside at home, was treated by her parents, although very kindly, rather as an honoured guest than a cherished daughter.

Anne Floyd was a sweet creature in spite of a little over-acuteness. I used to think she wanted nothing but falling in love to soften her proud spirit, and tame her bright eye ; but falling in love was quite out of her way—she had the unfortunate distrust of an heiress, sated with professions of attachment, and suspecting every man of wooing her fortune rather than herself. By dint of hearing exaggerated praise of her beauty, she had even come to think herself plain ; perhaps another circumstance a little contributed to this persuasion—she was said to be, and undoubtedly was, remarkably like her father. There is no accounting for the strange freaks that nature plays in the matter of family likeness. The admiral was certainly as ugly a little man as one should see in a summer day, and Anne was as certainly a very pretty young woman : yet it was quite impossible to see them together and not be struck with the extreme and even absurd resemblance between his old battered face and her bright

and sparkling countenance. To have been so like my good friend the admiral might have cured a lighter spirit of vanity.

Julia, the younger and favourite daughter, was a fine tall handsome girl of nineteen, just what her mother must have been at the same age ; she had been entirely brought up by Mrs. Floyd, except when deposited from time to time in various country boarding-schools, whilst that good lady enjoyed the pleasure of a cruise. Miss Julia exhibited the not uncommon phenomenon of having imbibed the opposite faults to those of her instructress, and was soft, mincing, languid, affected, and full of airs and graces of the very worst sort ; but I don't know that she was much more ignorant and silly than a girl of nineteen, with a neglected education, must needs be ; and she had the farther excuse of being a spoiled child. Her father doated upon her, and thought her the most accomplished young woman of the age ; for certain, she could play a little, and sing a little, and paint a little, and talk a little very bad French, and dance and dress a great deal. She had also cultivated her mind by reading all the love-stories and small poetry that came in her way ; corresponded largely with half-a-dozen bosom friends picked up at her different seminaries : and even aspired to the character of authoress, having actually perpetrated a sonnet to the moon, which sonnet, contrary to the well-known recipe of Boileau and

the ordinary practice of all nations, contained eighteen lines, four quatrains, and a couplet ; a prodigality of words which the fair poetess endeavoured to counterbalance by a corresponding sparingness of idea. There was no harm in Julia, poor thing, with all her affectation. She was really warm-hearted and well-tempered, and might have improved under her sister's kind and judicious management, but for a small accident which interrupted the family harmony, and eventually occasioned their removal from Hannonby.

The admiral, always addicted to favouritism, had had under his protection, from boyhood to manhood, one youth of remarkable promise. He had been his first lieutenant on board the Mermaiden, and was now, at three-and-twenty, a master and commander ; which promotion, although it ejected him from that paragon of frigates, the young captain did not seem to think so great an evil as the admiral had found his advancement. He was invited to the White House forthwith ; and the gallant veteran, who seldom took the trouble to conceal any of his purposes, soon announced that Captain Claremont was his intended son-in-law, and that Miss Julia was the destined bride.

The gentleman arrived, and did as much honour to the admiral's taste as his other favourite Bill Jones. Captain Claremont was really a very fine young man, with the best part of beauty, figure and countenance.

and a delightful mixture of frankness and feeling, of spirit and gaiety, in his open and gentlemanly manners; he was, at a word, just the image that one conjures up when thinking of a naval officer. His presence added greatly to the enjoyment of the family; the admiral “fought his battles over again,” and so did his lady, who talked and laughed all day long: Anne watched the proceedings with evident amusement, and looked even archer than usual; whilst Julia, the heroine of the scene, behaved as is customary in such cases, walked about, exquisitely dressed, with a book in her hand, or reclined in a picturesque attitude expecting to be made love to; and Captain Claremont, who had never seen either sister before, pleased with Julia’s beauty and a little alarmed at Anne’s wit, appeared in a fair way of losing his heart in the proper quarter. In short, the flirtation seemed going on very prosperously; and the admiral, in high glee, vented divers sea jokes on the supposed lovers, and chuckled over the matter to Bill Jones, who winked and grinned and nodded responsively.

After a few weeks that sagacious adherent began to demur—“Things seemed,” as he observed, “rather at a stand-still—the courtship was a deal slacker, and his honour, the captain, had talked of heaving anchor, and sailing off for Lincolnshire.” To this the admiral answered nothing but “tush!” and “pshaw!” and as the

captain actually relinquished, with very little pressing, his design of leaving Hannonby, Bill Jones's suspicions did seem a little super-subtle. Bill, however, at the end of ten days, retained his opinion. "For certain," he said, "Miss Julia had all the signs of liking upon her, and moped and hung her head and talked to herself like the negro who drowned himself for love on board the Mermaiden ; and the captain, he could not say but he might be in love—he was very much fallen away since he had been in that latitude—had lost his spunk, and was become extraordinarily forgetsome,—he might be in love, likely enough, but not with Miss Julia—he was sure to sheer away from her ; never spoke to her at breakfast or dinner, and would tack a hundred ways not to meet her, whilst he was always following in the wake of Miss Anne ; and she (Miss Julia) had taken to writing long letters again, and to walking the terrace between the watches, and did not seem to care for the captain. He could not make the matter out. Miss Anee, indeed."—Here the admiral, to whom the possibility of a failure in his favourite scheme had never occurred, interrupted his confidant by a thousand exclamations of "ass ! blockhead ! lubber !" to which tender appellations, that faithful satellite made no other reply than a shake of the head as comprehensive as Lord Burleigh's.

The next morning vindicated Bill's sagacity. Anne,

who, for obvious reasons, had taken the task upon herself, communicated to her father that Captain Claremont had proposed to her and that she had accepted his offer. The admiral was furious, but Anne, though very mild, was very firm ; she would not give up her lover, nor would her lover relinquish her ; and Julia, when appealed to, asserted her female privilege of white-lying, and declared, that if there was not another man in the world, she would never have married Captain Claremont. The admiral, thwarted by every body, and compelled to submit for the first time in his life (except in the affair of his promotion and that of the ducked sailor), stormed, and swore, and scolded all round, and refused to be pacified ; Mrs. Floyd, to whom his fiat had seemed like fate, was frightened at the general temerity, and vented her unusual discomfort in scolding too ; Anne took refuge in the house of a friend ; and poor Julia, rejected by one party and lectured by the other, comforted herself by running away, one fine night, with a young officer of dragoons, with whom she had had an off-and-on correspondence for a twelvemonth. This elopement was the cope-stone of the admiral's misfortunes ; he took a hatred to Hannonby, and left it forthwith ; and it seemed as if he had left his anger behind him, for the next tidings we heard of the Floyds, Julia and her spouse were forgiven in spite of his soldiership, and the match had turned out far better than might have been expected ;

and Anne and her captain were in high favour, and the admiral gaily anticipating a flag-ship and a war, and the delight of bringing up his grandsons to be the future ornaments of the British navy.

THE QUEEN OF THE MEADOW.

IN a winding unfrequented road, on the south side of our Village, close to a low, two-arched bridge, thrown across a stream of more beauty than consequence, stood the small irregular dwelling, and the picturesque buildings of Hatherford Mill. It was a pretty scene on a summer afternoon, was that old mill, with its strong lights and shadows, its low-browed cottage covered with the clustering Pyracantha, and the clear brook which after dashing, and foaming, and brawling, and playing off all the airs of a mountain river, while pent up in the mill-stream, was no sooner let loose, than it subsided into its natural peaceful character, and crept quietly along the valley, meandering through the green woody meadows, as tranquil a trout stream, as ever Izaak Walton angled in.

Many a traveller has stayed his step to admire the old buildings of Hatherford Mill, backed by its dark orchard, especially when its accompanying figures, the jolly miller sitting before the door, pipe in mouth, and jug in hand, like one of Teniers' boors, the mealy mil-

ler's man with his white sack over his shoulders, carefully descending the out-of-door steps, and the miller's daughter, flitting about amongst her poultry, gave life and motion to the picture.

The scenery at the other side of the road was equally attractive, in a different style. Its principal feature was the great farm of the parish, an old manorial house, solid and venerable, with a magnificent clump of witch elms in front of the porch, a suburb of out-buildings behind, and an old-fashioned garden with its rows of espaliers, its wide flower-borders, and its close filbert-walk, stretching like a cape into the waters, the strawberry beds, sloping into the very stream ; so that the cows, which in sultry weather, came down by twos, and by threes, from the opposite meadows, to cool themselves in the water, could almost crop the leaves as they stood.

In my mind, that was the pleasanter scene of the two ; but such could hardly have been the general opinion, since nine out of ten passers by, never vouchsafed a glance at the great farm, but kept their eyes steadily fixed on the mill ; perhaps to look at the old buildings, perhaps at the miller's young daughter.

Katy Dawson was accounted by common consent the prettiest girl in the parish. Female critics in beauty would be sure to limit the commendation by asserting that her features were irregular, that she had not a good

feature in her face, and so forth ; but these remarks were always made in her absence, and no sooner did she appear than even her critics felt the power of her exceeding loveliness. It was the Hebe look of youth and health, the sweet and joyous expression, and above all, the unrivalled brilliancy of colouring, that made Katy's face, with all its faults, so pleasant to look upon. A complexion of the purest white, a coral lip, and a cheek like the pear, her namesake, "on the side that's next the sun," were relieved by rich curls of brown hair, of the deep yet delicate hue that one sometimes finds in the ripest and latest hazel-nut of the season. Her figure was well suited to her blossomy countenance, round, short, and child-like ; add to this, "a pretty foot, a merry glance, a passing pleasing tongue," and no wonder that Katy was the belle of the village.

But gay and smiling though she were, the fair maid of the mill was little accessible to wooers. Her mother had long been dead, and her father, who held her as the very apple of his eye, kept her carefully away from the rustic junketings, at which rural flirtations are usually begun. Accordingly our village beauty had reached the age of eighteen, without a lover. She had indeed had two offers ; one from a dashing horse-dealer, who having seen her for five minutes one day, when her father called her to admire a nag that he was cheapening, proposed for her that very night as they were chaffering

about the price, and took the refusal in such dudgeon, that he would have left the house utterly inconsolable, had he not contrived to comfort himself by cheating the offending papa, twice as much as he intended, in his horse bargain. The other proffer was from a staid, thick, sober, silent, middle-aged personage, who united the offices of schoolmaster and land-measurer, an old crony of the good miller's, in whose little parlour he had smoked his pipe regularly every Saturday evening for the last thirty years, and who called him still from habit, "Young Sam Robinson." He, one evening as they sat together smoking, outside the door, broke his accustomed silence, with a formal demand of his comrade's permission to present himself as a suitor to Miss Katy; which permission being, as soon as her father could speak for astonishment, civilly refused, Master Samuel Robinson addressed himself to his pipe again, with his wonted phlegm, played a manful part in emptying the ale jug, and discussing the Welsh rabbit, reappeared as usual, on the following Saturday, and to judge from his whole demeanour, seemed to have entirely forgotten his unlucky proposal.

Soon after the rejection of this most philosophical of all discarded swains, an important change took place in the neighbourhood, in the shape of a new occupant of the great farm. The quiet respectable old couple, who had resided there for half a century, had erected

the mossy sun-dial, and planted the great mulberry-tree, having determined to retire from business, were succeeded by a new tenant from a distant county, the youngest son of a gentleman brought up to agricultural pursuits, whose spirit and activity, his boldness in stocking and cropping, and his scientific management of manures and machinery, formed the strongest possible contrast with the old-world practices of his predecessors. All the village was full of admiration of the intelligent young farmer, Edward Grey; who being unmarried, and of a kindly and sociable disposition, soon became familiar with high and low, and was no where a greater favourite than with his opposite neighbour, our good miller.

Katy's first feeling towards her new acquaintance, was an awe, altogether different from her usual shame-facedness; a genuine fear of the quickness and talent which broke out not merely in his conversation, but in every line of his acute and lively countenance. There was occasionally, a sudden laughing light in his hazel eye, and a very arch and momentary smile, now seen, and now gone, to which, becoming as most people thought them, she had a particular aversion. In short she paid the young farmer, for so he persisted in being called, the compliment of running away, as soon as he came in sight, for three calendar months. At the end of that time, appearances mended. First she began to

loiter at the door ; then she staid in the room ; then she listened ; then she smiled ; then she laughed outright ; then she ventured to look up ; then she began to talk in her turn ; and before another month had past, would prattle to Edward Grey as fearlessly and freely, as to her own father.

On his side, it was clear that the young farmer with all his elegance and refinement, his education and intelligence, liked nothing better than this simple village lass. He passed over the little humours, proper to her as a beauty and a spoiled child, with the kindness of an indulgent brother ; was amused with her artlessness, and delighted with her gaiety. Gradually he began to find his own fireside lonely, and the parties of the neighbourhood boisterous ; the little parlour of the miller formed just the happy medium, quietness without solitude, and society without dissipation—and thither he resorted accordingly. His spaniel Ranger, taking possession of the middle of the hearth-rug, just as comfortably, as if in his master's own demesnes, and Katy's large tabby cat, a dog-hater by profession, not merely submitting to the usurpation, but even ceasing to erect her bristles on his approach.

So the world waned for three months more. One or two little miffs had, indeed, occurred between the parties ; once, for instance, at a fair held in the next town on the first of May, Katy having been frightened at the lions

and tigers painted outside a show, had nevertheless been half-led, half-forced into the booth to look at the real living monsters, by her ungallant beau. This was a sad offence. But unluckily our village damsels had been so much entertained by some monkeys and parrots on her first entrance, that she quite forgot to be frightened, and afterwards when confronted with the royal brutes, had taken so great a fancy to a beautiful panther, as to wish to have him for a pet ; so that this quarrel passed away almost as soon as it began. The second was about the colour of a ribband, an election ribband ; Katy having been much caught by the graceful person and gracious manners of a county candidate, who called to request her father's vote, had taken upon herself to canvass their opposite neighbour, and was exceedingly astonished to find her request refused, on no better plea, than a difference from her favourite in political opinion, and a previous promise to his opponent. The little beauty, astonished at her want of influence, and rendered zealous by opposition, began to look grave, and parties would certainly have run high at Hatherford, had not her candidate put a stop to the dispute, by declining to come to the poll. So that that quarrel was, per force, pretermitted. At last, a real and serious anxiety, overclouded Katy's innocent happiness ; and as it often happens, in this world of contradictions, the grievance took the form of a gratified wish.

Of all her relations, her cousin Sophy Maynard had long been her favourite. She was an intelligent unaffected young woman, a few years older than herself; the daughter of a London tradesman, excellently brought up, with a great deal of information and taste, and a total absence of airs and finery. In person, she might almost be called plain, but there was such a natural gentility about her; her manners were so pleasing and her conversation so attractive, that few people after passing an evening in her society remembered her want of beauty. She was exceedingly fond of the country, and of her pretty cousin, who, on her part, looked up to her with much of the respectful fondness of a younger sister; and had thought to herself a hundred times, when most pleased with their new neighbour, "how I wish my cousin Sophy could see Edward Grey," and now that her cousin Sophy had seen Edward Grey, poor Katy would have given all that she possessed in the world, if they had never met. They were heartily delighted with each other, and proclaimed openly their mutual good opinion. Sophy praised Mr. Grey's vivacity; Edward professed himself enchanted with Miss Maynard's voice. Each was astonished to find in the other, a cultivation unusual in that walk of life. They talked, and laughed, and sang together, and seemed so happy that Katy, without knowing why, became quite miserable; flew from Edward, avoided Sophy, shrank away from

her kind father, and found no rest or comfort, except when she could creep alone to some solitary place, and give vent to her vexation in tears. Poor Katy! she could not tell what ailed her, but she was quite sure that she was wretched; and then she cried again.

In the meanwhile, the intimacy between the new friends became closer and closer. There was an air of intelligence between them, that might have puzzled wiser heads than that of our simple miller-maiden. A secret—Could it be a love-secret? And the influence of the gentleman was so open and avowed, that Sophy, when on the point of departure, consented to prolong her visit to Hatherford, at his request, although she had previously resisted Katy's solicitations, and the hospitable urgency of her father.

Affairs were in this posture, when one fine evening, towards the end of June, the cousins sallied forth for a walk, and were suddenly joined by Edward Grey, when at such a distance from the house, as to prevent the possibility of Katy's stealing back thither, as had been her usual habit on such occasions. The path they chose, led through long narrow meadows, sloping down, on either side, to the winding stream, enclosed by high hedges, and, seemingly, shut out from the world.

A pleasant walk it was, through those newly-mown meadows, just cleared of the hay, with the bright rivulet meandering through banks so variously beautiful; now

fringed by rushes and sedges ; now bordered by little thickets of hawthorn, and woodbine, and the briar-rose ; now overhung by a pollard ash, or a silver-barked beech, or a lime tree in full blossom. Now a smooth turf-y slope, green to the eye, and soft to the foot ; and now again a rich embroidery of the golden flag, the purple willow-herb, the blue forget-me-not, and “ a thousand fresh-water flowers of several colours,” making the bank as gay as a garden.

It was impossible not to pause in this lovely spot ; and Sophy, who had been collecting a bright bunch of pink blossoms, the ragged-robin, the wild rose, the crane’s-bill, and the fox-glove, or to use the prettier Irish name of that superb plant, the fairy-cap, appealed to Katy to “ read a lecture of her country art,” and show “ what every flower, as country people hold, did signify.” A talent for which the young maid of the mill was as celebrated as Bellario. But poor Katy, who, declining Edward’s offered arm, had loitered a little behind, gathering a long wreath of the woodbine, and the briony, and the wild vetch, was, or pretended to be, deeply engaged in twisting the garland round her straw bonnet, and answered not a word. She tied on her bonnet, however, and stood by listening, whilst the other two continued to talk of the symbolic meaning of flowers, quoting the well-known lines from the Winter’s Tale, and the almost equally charming passage from Philaster.

At length Edward, who, during the conversation, had been gathering all that he could collect of the tall almond-scented tufts of the elegant meadow-sweet, whose crested blossoms arrange themselves in a plumage so richly delicate, said, holding up his nosegay, “I do not know what mystical interpretation may be attached to this plant in Katy’s ‘country art,’ but it is my favourite amongst flowers ; and if I were inclined to follow the Eastern fashion of courtship, and make love by a nosegay, I should certainly send it to plead my cause. And it shall be so,” he added, after a short pause, his bright and sudden smile illuminating his whole countenance ; “the botanical name signifies, the Queen of the Meadow, and wherever I offer this tribute, wherever I place this tuft, the homage of my heart, the proffer of my hand shall go also. Oh, that the offering might find favour with my queen!” Katy heard no more. She turned away to a little bay formed by the rivulet, where a bed of pebbles, overhung by a grassy bank, afforded a commodious seat, and there she sat her down, trembling, cold, and wretched ; understanding, for the first time, her own feelings, and wondering if any body in all the world had ever been so unhappy before.

There she sat, with the tears rolling down her cheeks, unconsciously making “rings of rushes that grew thereby,” and Edward’s dog Ranger, who had been

watching a shoal of minnows at play in the shallow water, and every now and then inserting his huge paw into the stream, as if trying to catch one, came to her, and laid his rough head, and his long curling brown ears into her lap, and looked at her with “eyes whose human meaning did not need the aid of speech”—eyes full of pity and of love ; for Ranger, in common with all the four-footed world, loved Katy dearly : and now he looked up in her face, and licked her cold hand. Oh ! kinder and faithfuller than your master, thought poor Katy, as, with a fresh gush of tears, she laid her sweet face on the dog's head, and sat in that position, as it seemed to her, for ages, whilst her companions were hooking and landing some white water-lilies.

At last they approached, and she arose hastily, and tremblingly, and walked on, anxious to escape observation. “Your garland is loose, Katy,” said Edward, lifting his hand to her bonnet : “Come and see how nicely I have fastened it ! No clearer mirror than the dark smooth basin of water, under those hazels ! Come !” He put her hand under his arm, and led her thither ; and there, when mechanically she cast her eyes on the stream, she saw the rich tuft of meadow-sweet, the identical Queen of the Meadow, waving like a plume, over her own straw bonnet : felt herself caught in Edward’s arms ; for between surprise and joy, she had well nigh fallen ; and when, with instinctive modesty, she escaped

from his embrace, and took refuge with her cousin, the first sound that she heard was Sophy's affectionate whisper, "I knew it all the time, Katy! every body knew it but you! and the wedding must be next week, for I have promised Edward to stay and be bride's-maid;" and the very next week they were married.

DORA CRESWELL.

Few things are more delightful than to saunter along these green lanes of ours, in the busy harvest-time; the deep verdure of the hedge-rows, and the strong shadow of the trees, contrasting so vividly with the fields, partly waving with golden corn, partly studded with regular piles of heavy wheat-sheaves; the whole population abroad; the whole earth teeming with fruitfulness, and the bright autumn sun careering overhead, amidst the deep blue sky, and the fleecy clouds of the most glowing, and least fickle of the seasons. Even a solitary walk loses its loneliness in the general cheerfulness of nature. The air is gay with bees and butterflies; the robin twitters from amongst the ripening hazle-nuts; and you cannot proceed a quarter of a mile, without encountering some merry group of leasers; or some long line of majestic wains, groaning under their rich burthen, brushing the close hedges on either side, and knocking their tall tops against the overhanging trees; the very image of ponderous plenty.

Pleasant, however, as such a procession is to look at, it is somewhat dangerous to meet, especially in a narrow lane ; and I thought myself very fortunate one day last August, in being so near a five-barred gate, as to be enabled to escape from a cortége of labourers, and harvest-waggons, sufficiently bulky and noisy to convoy half the wheat in the parish. On they went, men, women, and children, shouting, laughing, and singing in joyous expectation of the coming harvest-home ; the very waggons nodding from side to side, as if tipsy, and threatening every moment to break down bank, and tree, and hedge, and crush every obstacle that opposed them. It would have been as safe to encounter the car of Juggernaut ; I blest my stars for my escape ; and after leaning on the friendly gate until the last gleaner had passed, a ragged rogue of seven years old, who, with hair as white as flax, a skin as brown as a berry, and features as grotesque as an Indian idol, was brandishing his tuft of wheat-ears, and shrieking forth, in a shrill childish voice, and with a most ludicrous gravity, the popular song of "Buy a broom"—after watching this young gentleman, (the urchin is of my acquaintance) as long as a curve in the lane would permit, I turned to examine in what spot chance had placed me, and found before my eyes another picture of rural life, but one as different from that which I had just witnessed, as the Arcadian peasants of Poussin, from the Booms.

of Teniers, or weeds from flowers, or poetry from prose.

I had taken refuge in a harvest-field belonging to my good neighbour, Farmer Creswell; a beautiful child lay on the ground at some little distance, whilst a young girl, resting from the labour of reaping, was twisting a rustic wreath of enamelled corn-flowers, brilliant poppies, snow-white lily-bines, and light fragile hare-bells, mingled with tufts of the richest wheat-ears, around its hat.

There was something in the tender youthfulness of these two innocent creatures, in the pretty, though somewhat fantastic, occupation of the girl, the fresh wild-flowers, the ripe and swelling corn that harmonized with the season and the hour, and conjured up memories of "Dis and Proserpine," and of all that is gorgeous and graceful, in old mythology; of the lovely Lavinia of our own poet, and of that finest pastoral of the world, the far lovelier Ruth. But these fanciful associations soon vanished before the real sympathy excited by the actors of the scene, both of whom were known to me, and both objects of a sincere and lively interest.

¹⁴ The young girl, Dora Creswell, was the orphan niece of one of the wealthiest yeomen in our part of the world, the only child of his only brother; and having lost both her parents whilst still an infant, had been

reared by her widowed uncle as fondly and carefully as his own son Walter. He said that he loved her quite as well, perhaps he loved her better; for though it was impossible for a father not to be proud of the bold handsome youth, who at eighteen, had a man's strength, and a man's stature; was the best ringer, the best cricketer, and the best shot in the county; yet the fairy Dora, who nearly ten years younger, was at once his handmaid, his housekeeper, his plaything, and his companion, was evidently the apple of his eye. Our good farmer vaunted her accomplishments, as men of his class are wont to boast of a high-bred horse, or a favourite greyhound.

She could make a shirt and a pudding, darn stockings, rear poultry, keep accounts, and read the newspaper; was as famous for gooseberry wine as Mrs. Primrose, and could compound a syllabub with any dairy-woman in the county. There was not so handy a little creature any where; so thoughtful and trusty about the house, and yet out of doors as gay as a lark, and as wild as the wind; nobody was like his Dora. So said, and so thought Farmer Creswell; and before Dora was ten years old, he had resolved that in due time she should marry his son, Walter, and had informed both parties of his intention.

Now, Farmer Creswell's intentions were well known to be as unchangeable as the laws of the Medes and

Persians. He was a fair specimen of an English yeoman, a tall, square-built, muscular man, stout and active, with a resolute countenance, a keen eye, and an intelligent smile ; his temper was boisterous and irascible, generous and kind to those whom he loved, but quick to take offence, and slow to pardon, expecting and exacting implicit obedience from all about him. With all Dora's good gifts, the sweet and yielding nature of the gentle and submissive little girl, was undoubtedly the chief cause of her uncle's partiality. Above all, he was obstinate in the highest degree, had never been known to yield a point, or change a resolution ; and the fault was the more inveterate, because he called it firmness, and accounted it a virtue. For the rest, he was a person of excellent principle, and perfect integrity ; clear-headed, prudent, and sagacious ; fond of agricultural experiments, which he pursued cautiously, and successfully ; a good farmer, and a good man.

His son Walter, who was in person a handsome likeness of his father, resembled him also in many points of character, was equally obstinate, and far more fiery, hot, and bold. He loved his pretty cousin, much as he would have loved a favourite sister, and might very possibly, if let alone, have become attached to her as his father wished ; but to be dictated to, to be chained down to a distant engagement, to hold himself bound

to a mere child ; the very idea was absurd ; and restraining with difficulty an abrupt denial, he walked down into the village, predisposed, out of sheer contradiction, to fall in love with the first young woman who should come in his way ; and he did fall in love accordingly.

Mary Hay, the object of his ill-fated passion, was the daughter of the respectable mistress of a small endowed school at the other end of the parish. She was a delicate, interesting creature, with a slight, drooping figure, and a fair, downcast face, like a snow-drop, forming such a contrast with her gay and gallant wooer, as Love, in his vagaries, is often pleased to bring together.

The courtship was secret and tedious, and prolonged from months to years : for Mary shrank from the painful contest which she knew that an avowal of their attachment would occasion. At length her mother died, and deprived of home, and maintenance, she reluctantly consented to a private marriage ; an immediate discovery ensued, and was followed by all the evils, and more than all, that her worst fears had anticipated. Her husband was turned from the house of his father, and in less than three months, his death, by an inflammatory fever, left her a desolate and penniless widow—unowned and unassisted by the stern parent, on whose unrelenting temper neither the death of his son, nor the birth of his grandson, seemed to make the slightest

impression. But for the general sympathy excited by the deplorable situation, and blameless demeanour of the widowed bride, she and her infant might have taken refuge in the workhouse. The whole neighbourhood was zealous to relieve, and to serve them ; but their most liberal benefactress, their most devoted friend, was poor Dora. Considering her uncle's partiality to herself as the primary cause of all this misery, she felt like a guilty creature ; and casting off at once her native timidity, and habitual submission, she had repeatedly braved his anger, by the most earnest supplications for mercy and for pardon ; and when this proved unavailing, she tried to mitigate their distresses by all the assistance that her small means would permit. Every shilling of her pocket-money, she expended upon her poor cousins ; worked for them, begged for them, and transferred to them every present that was made to herself, from a silk frock, to a penny tartlet. Every thing that was her own, she gave, but nothing of her uncle's ; for, though sorely tempted to transfer some of the plenty around her, to those whose claims seemed so just, and whose need was so urgent, Dora felt that she was trusted, and that she must prove herself trust-worthy.

Such was the posture of affairs, at the time of my encounter with Dora, and little Walter, in the harvest-field ; the rest will be best told in the course of our dialogue.

"And so, Madam ! I cannot bear to see my dear cousin Mary so sick, and so melancholy ; and the dear, dear, child, that a king might be proud of,—only look at him !" exclaimed Dora, interrupting herself, as the beautiful child, sitting on the ground, in all the placid dignity of infancy, looked up at me and smiled in my face ; "only look at him," continued she, "and think of that dear boy, and his dear mother living on charity, and they my uncle's lawful heirs, whilst I, who have no right whatever, no claim at all,—I, that compared to them, am but a far-off kinswoman, the mere creature of his bounty, should revel in comfort, and in plenty, and they starving ! I cannot bear it, and I will not. And then the wrong that he is doing himself, he that is really so good and kind, to be called a hard-hearted tyrant, by the whole country side. And he is unhappy himself too ; I know that he is ; so tired as he comes home, he will walk about his room half the night ; and often at meal-times, he will drop his knife and fork, and sigh so heavily. He may turn me out of doors, as he threatened ; or, what is worse, call me ungrateful, or undutiful, but he shall see this boy."

"He never has seen him then ? and that is the reason you are tricking him out so prettily."—*you don't*

"Yes, ma'am. Mind what I told you, Walter ! and hold up your hat, and say what I bid you."

"Gan-papa's fowers !" stammered the pretty boy.

in his sweet childish voice, the first words that I had ever heard him speak.

"Grand-papa's flowers!" said his zealous preceptor.

"Gan-papa's fowers!" echoed the boy.

"Shall you take the child to the house, Dora?" asked I.

"No, ma'am, for I look for my uncle here every minute, and this is the best place to ask a favour in, for the very sight of the great crop puts him in good humour; not so much on account of the profits, but because the land never bore half so much before, and it's all owing to his management in dressing and drilling. I came reaping here to-day, on purpose to please him; for though he says he does not wish me to work in the fields, I know he likes it; and here he shall see little Walter. Do you think he can resist him, ma'am," continued Dora, leaning over her infant cousin, with the grace and fondness of a young Madonna; "do you think he can resist him, poor child! so helpless, so harmless; his own blood too, and so like his father, no heart could be hard enough to hold out, and I am sure that his will not. Only," pursued Dora, relapsing into her girlish tone and attitude, as a cold fear crossed her enthusiastic hope,—"only, I'm half-afraid, that Walter will cry. It's strange, when one wants anything to behave particularly well, how sure it is to be naughty; my pets especially, I remember when my

Lady Countess came on purpose to see our white peacock, that we got in a present from India, the obstinate bird ran away behind a bean-stack, and would not spread his train, to shew the dead white spots on his glossy white feathers, all we could do. Her Ladyship was quite angry. And my red and yellow marvel of Peru, which used to blow at four in the afternoon, as regular as the clock struck, was not open the other day at five, when dear Miss Ellen came to paint it, though the sun was shining as bright as it does now. If Walter should scream and cry, for my uncle does sometimes look so stern ; and then it's Saturday, and he has such a beard ! if the child should be frightened !—Be sure, Walter, you don't cry !" said Dora, in great alarm.

" Gan-papa's fowers," replied the smiling boy, holding up his hat ; and his young protectress was comforted.

At that moment the farmer was heard whistling to his dog in a neighbouring field, and fearful that my presence might injure the cause, I departed, my thoughts full of the noble little girl, and her generous purpose.

I had promised to call the next afternoon, to learn her success ; and passing the harvest-field in my way, I found a group assembled there, which instantly dissipated my anxiety. On the very spot where we had parted, I saw the good farmer himself, in his Sunday clothes, tossing little Walter in the air ; the child laugh-

ing and screaming, with delight, and his grandfather, apparently quite as much delighted as himself. A pale, slender, young woman, in deep mourning, stood looking at their gambols with an air of intense thankfulness ; and Dora, the cause and sharer of all this happiness, was loitering behind, playing with the flowers in Walter's hat, which she was holding in her hand. Catching my eye, the sweet girl came to me instantly.

" I see how it is, my dear Dora ! and I give you joy from the bottom of my heart. Little Walter behaved well then ?"

" Oh he behaved like an angel."

" Did he say, Gan-papa's fowers ?"

" Nobody spoke a word. The moment the child took off his hat, and looked up, the truth seemed to flash on my uncle, and to melt his heart at once—the boy is so like his father. He knew him, instantly, and caught him up in his arms, and hugged him just as he is hugging him now."

" And the beard, Dora ?"

" Why, that seemed to take the child's fancy, he put up his little hands and stroked it ; and laughed in his grandfather's face, and flung his chubby arms round his neck, and held out his sweet mouth to be kissed ; and how my uncle did kiss him ! I thought he never would have done ; and then he sate down on a wheat-sheaf and cried ; and I cried too ! Very strange that

one should cry for happiness!" added Dora, as some large drops fell on the wreath which she was adjusting round Walter's hat; "Very strange," repeated she, looking up, with a bright smile, and brushing away the tears from her rosy cheeks, with a bunch of corn-flowers; "Very strange that I should cry, when I am the happiest creature alive; for Mary and Walter are to live with us; and my dear uncle, instead of being angry with me, says that he loves me better than ever. How very strange it is," said Dora, as the tears poured down, faster and faster, "that I should be so foolish as to cry!"

THE BIRD-CATCHER.

A LONDON fog is a sad thing, as every inhabitant of London knows full well: dingy, dusky, dirty, damp; an atmosphere black as smoke and wet as steam, that wraps round you like a blanket; a cloud reaching from earth to heaven; a "palpable obscure," which not only turns day into night, but threatens to extinguish the lamps and lanthorns, with which the poor street-wanderers strive to illumine their darkness, dimming and paling the "ineffectual fires," until the volume of gas at a shop-door cuts no better figure than a hedge glow-worm, and a duchess's flambeau would veil its glories to a Will-o'-the-wisp. A London fog is, not to speak profanely, a sort of renewal and reversal of Joshua's miracle; the sun seems to stand still as on that occasion, only that now it stands in the wrong place, and gives light to the Antipodes. The very noises of the street come stifled and smothered through that suffocating medium; din is at a pause; the town is silenced; and the whole population, biped and quadruped, sympathize with the dead and chilling weight of the out-of-door world. Dogs and

cats just look up from their slumbers, turn round, and go to sleep again ; the little birds open their pretty eyes, stare about them, wonder that the night is so long, and settle themselves afresh on their perches. Silks lose their gloss, cravats their stiffness, hackney-coachmen their way ; young ladies fall out of curl, and mammas out of temper ; masters scold ; servants grumble ; and the whole city, from Hyde Park Corner to Wapping, looks sleepy and cross, like a fine gentleman roused before his time, and forced to get up by candle-light. Of all detestable things, a London fog is the most detestable.

Now a country fog is quite another matter. To say nothing of its rarity, and in this dry and healthy midland county, few of the many variations of our variable English climate are rarer ; to say nothing of its unfrequent recurrence, there is about it much of the peculiar and characteristic beauty which almost all natural phenomena exhibit to those who have themselves that faculty, oftener perhaps claimed than possessed, a genuine feeling of nature. This last lovely autumn, when the flowers of all seasons seemed mingling as one sometimes sees them in a painter's garland—the violets and primroses reblooming, and new crops of sweet-peas and mignonette blending with the chrysanthemum, the Michaelmas daisy, and the dahlia, the latest blossoms of the year—when the very leaves clung to the trees with a freshness so

vigorous and so youthful, that they seemed to have determined, in spite of their old bad habit, that for once they would not fall—this last lovely autumn has given us more foggy mornings, or rather more foggy days, than I ever remember to have seen in Berkshire : days beginning in a soft and vapoury mistiness, enveloping the whole country in a veil, snowy, fleecy, and light, as the smoke which one often sees circling in the distance from some cottage chimney, or as the still whiter clouds which float around the moon ; and finishing in sunsets of a surprising richness and beauty, when the mist is lifted up from the earth, and turned into a canopy of unrivalled gorgeousness, purple, rosy, and golden, disclosing the splendid autumn landscape, with its shining rivulets, its varied and mellow woodland tints, and its deep emerald pasture lands, every blade and leaf covered with a thousand little drops, as pure as crystal, glittering and sparkling in the sunbeams like the dew on a summer morning, or the still more brilliant scintillations of frost.

It was in one of these days, early in November, that we set out about noon to pay a visit to a friend at some distance. The fog was yet on the earth, only some brightening in the south-west gave token that it was likely to clear away. As yet, however, the mist held complete possession—a much prettier, lighter, and cleaner vapour than that which is defiled with London smoke; but every

whit as powerful and as delusive. We could not see the shoemaker's shop across the road—no! nor our chaise when it drew up before our door; were fain to guess at our own laburnum tree; and found the sign of the Rose invisible, even when we ran against the sign-post. Our little maid, a kind and careful lass, who, perceiving the dreariness of the weather, followed us across the court with extra wraps, had well nigh tied my veil round her master's hat, and enveloped me in his bearskin; and my dog *Mayflower*, a white greyhound of the largest size, who had a mind to give us the undesired honour of her company, carried her point, in spite of the united efforts of half-a-dozen active pursuers, simply because the fog was so thick that nobody could see her. It was a complete game at boopeep. Even mine host of the Rose, one of the most alert of her followers, remained invisible, although we heard his voice close beside us.

A misty world it was, and a watery; and I that had been praising the beauty of the fleecy white fog every day for a week before, began to sigh, and shiver, and quake, as much from dread of an overturn as from damp and chilliness, whilst my careful driver and his sagacious steed went on groping their way through the woody lanes that lead to the Loddon. Nothing but the fear of confessing my fear, that feeling which makes so many cowards brave, prevented me from begging to turn back again. On, however, we went, the fog becoming every

moment heavier as we approached that beautiful and brimming river, which always, even in the midst of summer, brings with it such images of coolness and freshness as haunt the fancy after reading Undine ; and where on the present occasion we seemed literally to breathe water—as Dr. Clarke said in passing the Danube. My companion, nevertheless, continued to assure me that the day would clear—nay, that it was already clearing : and I soon found that he was right. As we left the river we seemed to leave the fog ; and before we had reached the pretty village of Barkham the mist had almost disappeared ; and I began to lose at once my silent fears and my shivering chilliness, and to resume my cheerfulness and my admiration.

It was curious to observe how object after object glanced out of the vapour. First of all, the huge oak, at the corner of Farmer Locke's field, which juts out into the lane like a crag into the sea, forcing the road to wind around it, stood forth like a hoary giant, with its head lost in the clouds ; then Farmer Hewitt's great barn—the house, ricks, and stables still invisible ; then a gate, and half a cow, her head being projected over it in strong relief, whilst the hinder part of her body remained in the haze ; then, more and more distinctly, hedgerows, cottages, trees, and fields, until, as we reached the top of Barkham Hill, the glorious sun broke forth, and the lovely picture lay before our eyes in its

soft and calm beauty, emerging gradually from the vapour that overhung it, in such manner as the image of his sleeping Geraldine is said to have been revealed to Surrey in the magic glass. A beautiful picture it forms at all times, that valley of Barkham. Fancy a road winding down a hill between high banks, richly studded with huge forest trees, oak and beech, to a sparkling stream, with a foot-bridge thrown across, which runs gurgling along the bottom ; then turning abruptly, and ascending the opposite hill, whilst the rich plantations and old paling of a great park " come cranking in" on one side, and two or three irregular cottages go straggling up on the other ; the whole bathed in the dewy sunshine, and glowing with the vivid colouring of autumn. The picture had, at the moment of which I speak, an additional interest, by presenting to our eyes the first human being whom we had seen during our drive (we had heard several) ; one, too, who, although he bore little resemblance to the fair mistress of Lord Surrey, was yet sufficiently picturesque, and in excellent keeping with the surrounding scene.

It was a robust, sturdy old man, his long grey hair appearing between his well-worn hat and his warm but weather-beaten coat, with a large package at his back, covered with oilskin, a bundle of short regular poles in one hand, and a large bunch of thistles in the other ; and even before Mayflower, who now made her appearance,

and was endeavouring to satisfy her curiosity by pawing and poking the knapsack, thereby awaking the noisy fears of two call-birds, who, together with a large bird-net, formed its contents,—before this audible testimony of his vocation, or the still stronger assurance of his hearty good-humoured visage, my companion, himself somewhat of an amateur in the art, had recognized his friend and acquaintance Old Robin, the bird-catcher of B.

We soon overtook the old man, and after apologizing for Mayflower's misdemeanour, who by the way seemed sufficiently disposed to renew the assault, we proceeded at the same slow pace up the hill, holding disjointed chat on the badness of the weather these foggy mornings, and the little chance there was of doing much good with the nets so late in the afternoon. To which Robin gave a doleful assent. He was, however, going, he said, to try for a few linnets on the common beyond the Great House, and was in hopes to get a couple of wood-larks from the plantations. He wanted the woodlarks, above all things, for Mrs. Bennet, the alderman's lady of B., whose husband had left the old shop in the Market-place, and built a fine white cottage just beyond the turnpike-gate—so madam had set her heart on a couple of woodlarks, to hang up in her new shrubbery, and make the place look rural.

“ Hang up, Robin! Why there is not a tree a foot

high in the whole plantation ! Woodlarks ! Why they'll be dead before Christmas."

" That's sure enough, your honour," rejoined Robin.

" A soft-billed bird, that requires as much care as a nightingale!" continued my companion. " By the way, Robin, have you any nightingales now?"

" Two, Sir ; a hen——"

" A hen ! That's something remarkable !"

" A great curiosity, Sir ; for your honour knows that we always set the trap for nightingales by ear like; the creature is so shy that one can seldom see it, so one is forced to put the mealworm near where one hears the song ; and its the most uncommon thing that can be to catch a hen ; but I have one, and a fine cock too, that I caught last spring just afore building time. Two as healthy birds as ever were seen."

" Is the cock in song still ?"

" Aye, Sir, in full song ; piping away, jug, jug, jug, all the day, and half the night. I wish your honour would come and hear it." And, with a promise to that effect, we parted, each our several ways ; we to visit our friend, he to catch, if catch he could, a couple of woodlarks to make Mrs. Bennet's villa look rural.

Old Robin had not always been a bird-catcher. He had, what is called, fallen in the world. His father had been the best-accustomed and most fashionable shoe-maker in the town of B., and Robin succeeded, in right

of eldership, to his house, his business, his customers, and his debts. No one was ever less fitted for the craft. Birds had been his passion from the time that he could find a nest or string an egg : and the amusement of the boy became the pursuit of the man. No sooner was he his own master than his whole house became an aviary, and his whole time was devoted to breeding, taming, and teaching the feathered race ; an employment that did not greatly serve to promote his success as a cordwainer. He married ; and an extravagant wife, and a neglected, and, therefore, unprosperous business, drove him more and more into the society of the pretty creatures, whose company he had always so greatly preferred to that of the two-legged unfeathered animal, called man. Things grew worse and worse ; and at length poor Robin appeared in the *Gazette*—ruined, as his wife and his customers said, by birds : or, as he himself said, by his customers and his wife. Perhaps there was some truth on either side ; at least, a thousand pounds of bad debts on his books, and a whole pile of milliners and mantua-makers' bills, went nigh to prove the correctness of his assertion. Ruined, however, he was ; and a happy day it was for him, since his stock being sold, his customers gone, and his prospects in trade fairly at an end, his wife (they had no family) deserted him also, and Robin, thus left a free man, determined to follow the bent of his genius, and devote the

remainder of his life to the breeding, catching, and selling of birds.

For this purpose he hired an apartment in the ruinous quarter of B. called the Soak, a high, spacious attic, not unlike a barn, which came recommended to him by its cheapness, its airiness, and its extensive cage-room ; and his creditors having liberally presented him with all the inhabitants of his aviary, some of which were very rare and curious, as well as a large assortment of cages, nets, traps, and seeds, he began his new business with great spirit, and has continued it ever since with various success, but with unabating perseverance, zeal, and good humour—a very poor and a very happy man. His garret in the Soak is one of the boasts of B. ; all strangers go to see the birds and the bird-catcher, and most of his visitors are induced to become purchasers, for there is no talking with Robin on his favourite subject without catching a little of his contagious enthusiasm. His room is quite a menagerie, something like what the feathered department of the ark must have been—as crowded, as numerous, and as noisy.

The din is really astounding. To say nothing of the twitter of whole legions of linnets, goldfinches, and canaries, the latter of all ages ; the chattering and piping of magpies, parrots, jackdaws, and bullfinches, in every stage of their education ; the deeper tones of blackbirds, thrushes, larks, and nightingales, never fail to swell the

chorus; aided by the cooing of doves, the screechings of owls, the squeakings of guinea-pigs, and the eternal grinding of a barrel-organ, which a little damsel of eight years old, who officiates under Robin as feeder and cleaner, turns round, with melancholy monotony, to the loyal and patriotic tunes of *Rule Britannia* and *God save the King*, the only airs, as her master observes, which are sure not to go out of fashion.

Except this young damsel and her music, the apartment exhibits but few signs of human habitation. A macaw is perched on the little table, and a cockatoo chained to the only chair; the roof is tenanted by a choice breed of tumbler pigeons, and the floor crowded by a brood of curious bantams, unrivalled for ugliness.

Here Robin dwells, in the midst of the feathered population, except when he sallies forth at morning or evening to spread his nets for goldfinches or bullfinches, on the neighbouring commons, or to place his trap-cages for the larger birds. Once or twice a year, indeed, he wanders into Oxfordshire, to meet the great flocks of linnets, six or seven hundred together, which congregate on those hills, and may be taken by dozens; and he has had ambitious thoughts of trying the great market of Covent-garden for the sale of his live-stock. But in general he remains quietly at home. That nest in the Soak is too precious a deposit to leave long; and

he is seldom without some especial favorite to tend and fondle. At present, the hen-nightingale seems his pet; the last was a white blackbird; and once he had a whole brood of gorgeous kingfishers, seven glorious creatures, for whose behoof he took up a new trade, and turned fisherman, dabbling all day with a hand-net in the waters of the Soak. It was the prettiest sight in the world to see them snatch the minnows from his hand, with a shy mistrustful tameness, glancing their bright heads from side to side, and then darting off like bits of the rainbow. I had an entire sympathy with Robin's delight in his kingfishers. He sold them to his chief patron, Mr. Jay, a little fidgety old bachelor, with a sharp face, a hooked nose, a brown complexion, and a full suit of snuff-colour, not much unlike a bird himself; and that worthy gentleman's mismanagement and a frosty winter killed the kingfishers every one. It was quite affecting to hear poor Robin talk of their death. But Robin has store of tender anecdotes; and any one who has a mind to cry over the sorrows of a widowed turtle-dove, and to hear described to the life her vermillion-eye, black gorget, soft plumage, and plaintive note, cannot do better than pay a visit to the garret in the Soak, and listen for half an hour to my friend the bird-catcher.

MY GODMOTHERS.

OF one of my godmothers I recollect but little. She lived at a distance, and seldom came in my way. The little, however, that I do remember of her, is very pleasing. She was the wife of a dignified clergyman, and resided chiefly in a great Cathedral town, to which I once or twice accompanied my father, whose near relation she had married. She was a middle-aged woman, with sons and daughters already settled in life, and must in her youth have been exceedingly lovely; indeed, in spite of an increase of size which had greatly injured her figure, she might still be deemed a model of matronly beauty. Her face was in the highest degree soft, feminine, and delicate, with an extreme purity and fairness of complexion; dove-like eyes, a gentle smile, and a general complacency and benevolence of aspect, such as I have rarely seen equalled. That sweet face was all sunshine. There was something in her look which realized the fine expression of the poet, when he speaks of—

——— “ those eyes affectionate and glad,
That seem'd to love whate'er they look'd upon.”

Her voice and manner were equally delightful, equally captivating, although quite removed from any of the usual arts of captivation. Their great charm was their perfect artlessness and graciousness, the natural result of a most artless and gracious nature. She kept little company, being so deaf as almost to unfit her for society. But this infirmity, which to most people is so great a disadvantage, seemed in her case only an added charm. She sat on her sofa in sober cheerfulness, placid and smiling, as if removed from the cares and the din of the work-a-day world ; or, if any thing particularly interesting was going forward in the apartment, she would look up with such a pretty air of appeal, such silent questioning, as made every body eager to translate for her,—some by loud distinct speech, some by writing, and some by that delicate and mysterious sign manual, that unwritten shorthand, called talking on the fingers, whatever happened to be passing ; and she was so attentive and so quick, that one sentence, half a sentence, a word, half a word, would often be enough. She could catch even the zest of a repartee, that most evanescent and least trans fusible of all things ; and when she uttered her pretty petition, “ Mirth, admit me of thy crew !” brought as ready a comprehension, as true a spirit of gaiety, and as much innocent enjoyment into a young and laughing circle, as she found there. Her reliance on the kindness and affection of

all around her was unbounded ; she judged of others by herself, and was quite free from mistrust and jealousy, the commonest and least endurable infirmity of the deaf. She went out little, but at home her hospitality and benevolence won all hearts. She was a most sweet person. I saw too little of her, and lost her too soon ; but I loved her dearly, and still cherish her memory.

Her husband was a very kind and genial person also, although in a different way. The Dean, for such was his professional rank, was a great scholar, an eminent Grecian, a laborious editor, a profound and judicious critic, an acute and sagacious commentator—who passed days and nights in his library, covered with learned dust, and deep in the metres. Out of his study he was, as your celebrated scholar is apt to be, exceedingly like a boy just let loose from school, wild with animal spirits; and ripe for a frolic. He was also (another not uncommon characteristic of an eminent Grecian) the most simple-hearted and easy-tempered creature that lived, and a most capital playfellow. I thought no more of stealing the wig from his head than a sparrow does of robbing a cherry-tree ; and he, merriest and most undignified of dignitaries, enjoyed the fun as much as I did, would toss the magnificent caxon (a full-bottomed periwig of most capacious dimensions,) as high in the air as its own gravity would permit it to ascend, to the

unspeakable waste of powder, and then would snatch me up in his arms, (a puny child of eight years old, who was as a doll in his sinewy hands,) and threaten to fling me after his flying peruke. He would have done just the same if he had been Archbishop of Canterbury—and so should I—the archi-episcopal wig would have shared the same fate; so completely did the joyous temperament of the man break down the artificial restraints of his situation. He was a most loveable person was Mr. Dean; but the charm and glory of the Deanery, was my dear godmamma.

My other godmother was a very different sort of person, and will take many more words to describe.

Mrs. Patience Wither (for so was she called) was the survivor of three maiden sisters, who, on the death of their father, a rich and well-descended country gentleman, had agreed to live together, and their united portions having centred in her, she was in possession of a handsome fortune. In point of fact, she was not my godmother, having only stood as proxy for her younger sister, Mrs. Mary, my mother's intimate friend, then falling into the lingering decline, of which she afterwards died. Mrs. Mary must have been, to judge of her from universal report, and from a portrait, which still remains, a most interesting woman, drooping, pale, and mild; and beautiful also, very beautiful, from elegance and expression. She was undoubtedly my real

godmamma; but, on her death, Mrs. Patience, partly from regard for her sister, partly out of compliment to my family, and partly, perhaps, to solace herself by the exercise of an office of some slight importance and authority, was pleased to lay claim to me in right of inheritance, and succeeded to the title of my godmother pretty much in the same way that she succeeded to the possession of Flora, her poor sister's favourite spaniel. I am afraid that Flora proved the more grateful subject of the two.

Mrs. Patience was of the sort of women that young people particularly dislike, and characterize by the ominous epithet, *cross*. She was worse than cross; stern, stiff, domineering, and authoritative. Her person was very masculine, tall, square, and large-boned, and remarkably upright. Her features were sufficiently regular, and would not have been unpleasing, but for the keen angry look of her light-blue eye, (your blue eye, which has such a name for softness amongst those great mistakers, lovers and poets, is often wild, and almost fierce in its expression,) and her fiery wavy red hair, to which age did no good,—it would not turn grey. In short she was, being always expensively dressed, and a good deal in the rear of fashion, not unlike my childish notion of that famous but disagreeable personage, Queen Elizabeth; which comparison being repeated to Mrs. Patience, who luckily took it for a compliment, added considerably to

the interest she was so good as to take in my health, welfare, and improvement.

I never saw her but she took possession of me for the purpose of lecturing and documenting on some subject or other,—holding up my head, shutting the door, working a sampler, making a shirt, learning the pence table, or taking physic. She used to hear me read French out of a well-thumbed copy of *Telemaque*, and to puzzle me with questions from the English chronology—which may, perhaps, be the reason, that I, at this day, to my great shame be it spoken, dislike that famous prose epic, and do not know in what century Queen Anne came to the throne.

In addition to these iniquities, she was assiduous in presents to me at home and at school; sent me cakes with cautions against over-eating, and needle-cases with admonitions to use them; she made over to me her own juvenile library, consisting of a large collection of unreadable books, which I, in my turn, have given away; nay, she even rummaged out for me a pair of old battledores, curiously constructed of netted pack-thread—the toys of her youth! But bribery is generally thrown away upon children, especially on spoilt ones; the godmother whom I loved never gave me any thing; and every fresh present from Mrs. Patience seemed to me a fresh grievance. I was obliged to make a call and a curtsy, and to stammer out something which

passed for a speech ; or, which was still worse, to write a letter of thanks—a stiff, formal, precise letter ! I would rather have gone without cakes or needle-cases, books or battledores, to my dying day. Such was my ingratitude from five to fifteen.

As time wore on, however, I amended. I began to see the value of constant interest and attention—even although the forms they assumed might not be the most pleasant—to be thankful for her kindness, and attentive to her advice ; and by the time I arrived at years of discretion had got to like her very much, especially in her absence, and to endure her presence (when it was quite impossible to run away) with sufficient fortitude. It is only since she has been fairly dead and buried, that I have learnt to estimate her properly. Now, I recollect how very worthy of esteem and respect she really was, how pious, how hospitable, how charitable, how generous ! Nothing but the comfort of knowing that she never found it out, could lull my remorse for having disliked her so much in her life-time ; the more especially, as upon recollection, I don't think she was so absolutely unbearable. She was only a little prejudiced, as one who had lived constantly in one limited sphere ; rather ignorant and narrow-minded, a full century behind the spirit of the age, as one who had read dull books, and kept dull company ; fearfully irritable, fretful, and cross, as one who has had all her life the great misfor-

tune (seldom enough pitied or considered) of having her own way ; and superlatively stiff, and starched, and prim, in her quality of old maid. There is a great improvement now-a-days in the matter of single ladies ; they may be, and many of them actually are, pleasant with impunity to man or woman, and are so like the rest of the world in way and word, that a stranger is forced to examine the third finger of the left hand, to ascertain whether or no they be married ; but Mrs. Patience was an old maid of the old school—there was no mistaking her condition—you might as well question that of the frost-bitten gentlewoman pacing to church through the snow in Hogarth's inimitable and unforgettable "Morning." With these drawbacks she was, as I have said before, an estimable person ; staunch in her friendships, liberal in her house-keeping, much addicted to all sorts of subscriptions, and a most active lecturer and benefactress of the poor, whom she scolded and relieved with indefatigable good will.

She lived in a large, tall, upright, stately house, in the largest street of a large town. It was a grave-looking mansion, defended from the pavement by iron palisades, a flight of steps before the sober brown door, and every window curtained and blinded by chintz and silk and muslin, crossing and jostling each other ; none of the rooms could be seen from the street, nor the street from any of the rooms—so complete was the obscurity. She

seemed to consider this window-veiling as a point of propriety; notwithstanding which, she contrived to know so well all the goings-on of all her neighbours, and who went up or who went down Chapel Street, that I could not help suspecting she had in some one of her many muffling draperies a sort of peep-hole, such as you sometimes see a face staring through in the green curtain at the playhouse. I am sure she must have had a contrivance of the kind, though I cannot absolutely say that I ever made out the actual slit ; but then I was cautious in my prying, and afraid of being caught. I am sure that a peep-hole there was.

She lived in a good position for an observatory too, her house being situate in a great thoroughfare, one end abutting on a popular chapel, the other on a celebrated dancing-academy, so that every day in the week brought affluence of carriages to the one side or the other ;—an influx of amusement of which she did not fail to make the most, enjoying it first, and complaining of it afterwards, after the fashion of those unfortunate persons who have a love of grumbling, and very little to grumble at. I don't know what she would have done without the resource afforded by her noisy neighbours, especially those on the saltatory side, whose fiddles, door-knockings, and floor-shakings, were the subject of perpetual objurgation ; for the usual complaining ground of the prosperous, health and nerves, was completely shut against her. She never

was ill in her life, and was too much in the habit of abusing nerves in other people to venture to make use of them on her own account. It was a most comfortable grievance, and completed the many conveniences of her commodious mansion.

Her establishment was handsome and regular, and would have gone on like clock-work, if she had not thought a due portion of managing, that is to say, of vituperation, absolutely necessary for the well-being of herself and her servants. It *did* go on like clock-work, for the well-seasoned domestics no more minded those diurnal scolding fits, than they did the great Japan time-piece in the hall when it struck the hour ; a ring of the bell, or a knock at the door, were events much more startling to this staid and sober household, who, chosen, the men for their age, and the women for their ugliness, always seemed to me to have a peculiar hatred to quick motion. They would not even run to get out of the way of their mistress, although pretty sure of a lecture, right or wrong, whenever she encountered them. But then, as the fishmonger said of the eels that he was skinning, —“They were used to it.”

The only things in the house which she did not scold were two favourite dogs—Flora, a fat, lazy, old spaniel, soft and round as a cushion, and almost as inert ; and Daphne, a particularly ugly, noisy pug, who barked at every body that came into the house, and bit at most.

Daphne was the pet *par excellence*. She over crowded even her mistress, as old Spenser hath it, and Mrs. Patience respected her accordingly. Really, comparing the size of the animal with the astonishing loudness and continuance of her din, she performed prodigies of barking. Her society was a great resource to me, when I was taken to pay my respects to my godmamma. She (I mean Daphne) had, after her surly and snip-snap manner, a kindness for me ; condescended to let me pat her head without much growling, and would even take a piece of cake out of my hand without biting my fingers. We were great friends. Daphne's company and conversation lightened the time amazingly. She was certainly the most entertaining person, the most *alive* of any one I met there.

Mrs. Patience's coterie was, to say the truth, rather select than numerous, rather respectable than amusing. It consisted of about half-a-dozen elderly ladies of unexceptionable quality, and one unfortunate gentleman, who met to play a rubber at each other's houses, about six evenings in the week, all the year round, and called on one another nearly every morning. The chief member of this chosen society was, next to Mrs. Patience, who would every where be first, Lady Lane, a widow, and Miss Pym, her maiden sister, who resided with her. Lady Lane was a round, quiet, sleepy woman, not unlike —with reverence be it spoken—to the fat spaniel Flora ;

you never knew when she was present, or when she was not; Miss Pym, sharper and brisker, thinner and shorter, bore more resemblance to my friend Daphne, the vixenish pug—you were pretty sure to hear *her*. There was also a grave and sedate Mrs. Long, a slow, safe, circumspect person, who talked of the weather ; a Mrs. Harden, speechifying and civil, and a Miss Harden, her daughter, civilier still: These were the ladies. The beau of the party, Mr. Knight, had been originally admitted in right of a deceased wife, and was retained on his own merits. In my life I never beheld a man so hideously ugly, tall, shambling, and disjointed, with features rough, huge, and wooden, grey hair, stiff and bristly, long shaggy eyebrows, a skin like a hide, and a voice and address quite in keeping with this amiable exterior, as uncouth as Caliban.

For these gifts and accomplishments he was undoubtedly preferred to the honour of being the only gentleman tolerated in this worshipful society, from which Dr. Black, the smart young physician, and Mr. White, the keen, sharp, clever lawyer, and Mr. Brown, the spruce curate of the parish, and even Mr. Green, the portly vicar, were excluded. I did not so much wonder at their admiring Mr. Knight for his ugliness, which was so grotesque and remarkable as to be really prepossessing—it was worth one's while to see any thing so complete in its way ; but I did a little marvel at his constancy to this

bevy of belles, for, strange and uncouth as the man was, there was an occasional touch of slyness and humour about him, and a perpetual flow of rough kindness, which, joined with his large property, would easily have gained him the entré into more amusing circles. Perhaps he liked to be the sole object of attention to six ladies, albeit somewhat past their prime; perhaps he found amusement in quizzing them — he was wicked enough sometimes to warrant the supposition; perhaps — for mixed motives are commonly the truest in that strangely compounded biped, man—a little of both might influence him; or perhaps a third, and still more powerful inducement, might lurk behind, as yet unsuspected. Certain it is, that every evening he was found in that fair circle, cordially welcomed by all its members except my godmamma. She, to be sure, minced and primmed, and tossed her head, and thought they should have been better without him; and although she admitted him to the privilege of visiting at her house, to the coffee, the green tea, the chit-chat, the rubber, the cake and the liqueur, she carefully refrained from honouring with her presence, the annual party at his country farm, where all the other ladies resorted to drink syllabub, and eat strawberries and cream; pertinaciously refused to let him drive her out airing in his handsome open carriage, and even went so far as to order her footman not to let him in when she was alone.

Besides her aversion to mankind in general, an aversion as fierce and active as it was groundless, she had unluckily, from having been assailed by two or three offers, obviously mercenary, imbibed a most unfounded suspicion of the whole sex ; and now seldom looked at a man without fancying that she detected in him an incipient lover ; sharing, in this respect, though from a reverse motive, the common delusion of the pretty and the young. She certainly suspected Mr. Knight of matrimonial intentions towards her fair self, and as certainly suspected him wrongfully. Mr. Knight had no such design ; and contrived most effectually to prove his innocence, one fair morning, by espousing Miss Harden, on whom, as she sat dutifully netting by the side of her mamma, at one corner of the card-table, I had myself observed him to cast very frequent and significant glances. Miss Harden was a genteel woman of six and thirty, rather faded, but still pleasing, and sufficiently dependent on her mother's life-income, to find in Mr. Knight's large fortune, to say nothing of his excellent qualities, an adequate compensation for his want of beauty. It was altogether a most suitable match, and so pronounced by the world at large, with the solitary exception of Mrs. Patience, who, though thus effectually secured from the attentions of her imputed admirer, by no means relished the means by which this desirable end had been accomplished. She sneered at the bride, abused the bride.

groom, found fault with the bride-cake, and finally withdrew herself entirely from her former associates, a secession by which, it may be presumed, her own comfort was more affected than theirs.

She now began to complain of solitude, and to talk of taking a niece to reside with her, a commodity of which there was no lack in the family. Her elder brother had several daughters, and desired nothing better than to see one of them adopted by Mrs. Patience. Three of these young ladies came successively on trial—pretty lively girls, so alike, that I scarcely remember them apart; can hardly assign to them a separate individuality, except that, perhaps, Miss Jane might be the tallest, and Miss Gertrude might sing the best. In one particular, the resemblance was most striking, their sincere wish to get turned out of favour and sent home again. No wonder! A dismal life it must have seemed to them, used to the liberty and gaiety of a large country house, full of brothers, and sisters, and friends, a quiet indulgent mother, a hearty hospitable father, riding and singing, and parties, and balls; a doleful contrast it must have seemed to them, poor things, to sit all day in that nicely furnished parlour, where the very chairs seemed to know their places, reading aloud some grave, dull book, or working their fingers to the bone, (Mrs. Patience could not bear to see young people idle,) walking just one mile out and one mile in, on the London

road ; dining tête-à-tête in all the state of two courses and removes ; playing all the evening at back-gammon, most unlucky if they won, and going to bed just as the clock struck ten ! No wonder that they exerted all their ingenuity to make themselves disagreeable ; and as that is an attempt in which people who set about it with thorough good will, are pretty certain to succeed, they were discarded, according to their wishes, with all convenient dispatch.

Miss Jemima was cashiered for reading novels, contrary to the statutes made and provided—Belinda, the delightful Belinda, sealed her fate. Miss Gertrude was dismissed for catching cold, and flirting with the apothecary, a young and handsome son of Galen, who was also turned off for the same offence. Miss Jane's particular act of delict has slipt my memory,—but she went too. There was some talk of sending little Miss Augusta, the youngest of the family, but she, poor child ! never made her appearance. She was her father's favourite, and probably begged off ; and they had by this time discovered at the Hall that their young lasses had been used to too much freedom to find the air of Chapel Street agree with them. The only one we ever saw again was Miss Jemima, who, having refused a rich baronet, a good deal older than herself, for no better reason than not liking him, was sent to her aunt's on a visit of penitence ; a sort of house of correction—an honourable ba-

nishment. I believe in my heart that the fair culprit would have preferred the Tread-Mill or Botany Bay, had she had her choice ; but there was no appeal from the *lettre de cachet* which had consigned her to Mrs. Patience's cares and admonitions, so she took refuge in a dumb resentment. I never saw any one so inveterately sullen in my life. One whole week she remained in this condition, abiding, as best she might, her aunt's never-ending lectures, and the intolerable ennui of the house, during a foggy November. The next, the rejected lover arrived at the door, and was admitted ; and before she had been three weeks in Chapel Street, Sir Thomas escorted her home as his intended bride. They were perfectly right in their calculations ; rather than have passed the winter with Mrs. Patience, the fair Jemima would have married her grandfather.

Another niece now made her appearance, who, from circumstances and situation, seemed peculiarly fitted for the permanent companion and heiress — the orphan daughter of a younger brother, lately deceased, who had left this only child but slenderly provided for. Miss Patience (for she was her aunt's namesake) was a young woman of two-and-twenty, brought up in a remote parsonage, without the advantage of any female to direct her education, and considerably more unformed and unpolished than one is accustomed to see a young lady in this accomplished age. She was a good deal like her

aunt in person—far more than comported with beauty—large-boned and red-haired, and looking at least ten years older than she really was. Ten years older, too, she was in disposition ; staid, sober, thoughtful, discreet ; would no more have read a novel or flirted with an apothecary than Mrs. Patience herself.

Aunt and niece seemed made for each other. But somehow they did not do together. One does not quite know why—perhaps because they were too much alike. They were both great managers ; but Miss Patience had been used to a lower range of household cares, and tormented mistress and servants by unnecessary savings and superfluous honesty. Then she was too useful ; *would* make the tea, *would* snuff the candles, *would* keep the keys ; affronted the housekeeper by offering to make the pastry, and the butler by taking under her care the argand lamp ; which last exploit was unsuccessful enough—a lamp being a sort of machine that never will submit to female direction ; a woman might as well attempt to manage a steam-engine. The luminary in question was particularly refractory. It had four burners, which never, for the three nights which she continued in office, were all in action together. Some sent forth long tongues of flame, like those which issue from the crater of a volcano, giving token of the crash that was to follow ; some popped outright, without warning ; and some again languished, and died away, leaving be-

hind them a most unsavoury odour. At last the resitive lamp was abandoned to the butler, and light restored to the drawing-room; and had Miss Patience taken a lesson from this misadventure, all might have gone well.

But Miss Patience was not of a temperament to profit by her own errors. She went on from bad to worse; disobliged Flora by plunging her in the wash-tub, to the great improvement of her complexion; made an eternal enemy of Daphne, by a fruitless attempt to silence her most noisy tongue; and, finally, lectured Mrs. Patience herself for scolding about nothing. In short, she was a reformer, honest, zealous, uncompromising, and indiscreet, as ever wore petticoats. She had in her head the *beau ideal* of a perfect domestic government, and would be satisfied with nothing less. She could not let well alone. So that she had not been a month in that well-ordered and orderly house, before her exertions had thrown every thing into complete disorder; the servants were in rebellion, the furniture topsy-turvy, and the lady; who found herself likely to be in the situation of that dynasty of French kings who reigned *under a maire du palais*, in a very justifiable passion. This rightful anger was, however, more moderately expressed than had usually happened with Mrs. Patience's causeless indignation. The aunt remonstrated, indeed, and threatened; but the niece would not stay. She was as unbending as

an oak-tree; rejected all compromise; spurned at all concession; abjured all rich relations; and returned to board at a farm-house in her old neighbourhood. After this contumacy her name was never heard in Chapel Street; and for some time the post of companion remained vacant.

At length Mrs. Patience began to break, visibly and rapidly, as the very healthy often do, affording so affecting a contrast with their former strength. In her the decline was merely bodily; neither the mind nor the temper had undergone any change; but her increasing feebleness induced her medical attendants to recommend that some one should be provided to sit with her constantly; and as she protested vehemently against any farther trial of nieces, the object was sought through the medium of an advertisement, and appeared to be completely attained when it produced Miss Steele. How Miss Steele should have failed to please, still astonished me. Pliant, soothing, cheerful, mild, with a wonderful command of countenance and of temper, a smiling aspect, a soft voice, a perpetual habit of assentation, and such a power over the very brute beasts, that Flora would get up to meet her, and Daphne would wag her tail at her approach—a compliment which that illustrious pug never paid before to *womankind*. Every heart in Chapel Street did Miss Steele win, except the invulnerable heart of Mrs. Patience.

She felt the falseness. The honey cloyed ; and before two months were over, Miss Steele had followed the nieces.

After this her decline was rapid, and her latter days much tormented by legacy-hunters. A spendthrift nephew besieged her in a morning—a miserly cousin came to lose his sixpences to her at backgammon of an afternoon—a subtle attorney, and an oily physician, had each an eye to her hoards, if only in the form of an executorship ; and her old butler, and still older housekeeper, already rich by their savings in her service, married, that they might share together the expected spoil. She died, and disappointed them all. Three wills were found. In the first, she divided her whole fortune between Flora and Daphne, and their offspring, under the direction of six trustees. In the second, she made the County-hospital her heir. In the third, the legal and effectual will, after formally disinheriting the rest of her relations, she bequeathed her whole estate, real and personal, to her honest niece Patience Wither, as a reward for her independence. And never was property better bestowed ; for Patience the Second, added all that was wanting to the will of Patience the First ; supplied every legacy of charity and of kindness ; provided for the old servants and the old pets, and had sufficient left to secure her own comfort with a man as upright and as downright as herself. They are the most English

couple of my acquaintance, and the happiest. Long may they continue so ! And all this happiness is owing to the natural right-mindedness and sturdy perception of character of my cross godmamma.

THE MOLE-CATCHER.

THERE are no more delightful or unfailing associations than those afforded by the various operations of the husbandman, and the changes on the fair face of nature. We all know that busy troops of reapers come with the yellow corn; whilst the yellow leaf brings a no less busy train of ploughmen and seedsmen preparing the ground for fresh harvests; that woodbines and wild roses, flaunting in the blossomy hedge-rows, give token of the gay bands of haymakers which enliven the meadows; and that the primroses, which begin to unfold their pale stars by the side of the green lanes, bear marks of the slow and weary female processions, the gangs of tired yet talkative bean-setters, who defile twice a day through the intricate mazes of our cross-country roads. These are general associations, as well known and as universally recognised as the union of mince-pies and Christmases. I have one, more private and peculiar, one, perhaps, the more strongly impressed on my mind, because the impression may be almost confined to myself. The full blush of violets which, about the middle of March,

seldom fails to perfume the whole earth, always brings to my recollection one solitary and silent coadjutor of the husbandman's labours, as unlike a violet as possible — Isaac Bint, the mole-catcher.

I used to meet him every spring, when we lived at our old house, whose park-like paddock, with its finely-clumped oaks and elms, and its richly-timbered hedge-rows, edging into wild, rude, and solemn fir-plantations, dark, and rough, and hoary, formed for so many years my constant and favourite walk. Here, especially under the great horse-chesnut, and where the bank rose high and naked above the lane, crowned only with a tuft of golden broom ; here the sweetest and prettiest of wild flowers, whose very name hath a charm, grew like a carpet under one's feet, enamelling the young green grass with their white and purple blossoms, and loading the air with their delicious fragrance : here I used to come almost every morning, during the violet-tide ; and here almost every morning I was sure to meet Isaac Bint.

I think that he fixed himself the more firmly in my memory by his singular discrepancy with the beauty and cheerfulness of the scenery and the season. Isaac is a tall, lean, gloomy personage, with whom the clock of life seems to stand still. He has looked sixty-five for these last twenty years, although his dark hair and beard, and firm, manly stride, almost contradict the evidence of his

sunken cheeks and deeply-lined forehead. The stride is awful : he hath the stalk of a ghost. His whole air and demeanour savour of one that comes from underground. His appearance is “of the earth, earthy.” His clothes, hands, and face, are of the colour of the mould in which he delves. The little round traps which hang behind him over one shoulder, as well as the strings of dead moles which embellish the other, are encrusted with dirt like a tombstone ; and the staff which he plunges into the little hillocks, by which he traces the course of his small quarry, returns a hollow sound, as if tapping on the lid of a coffin. Images of the church-yard come, one does not know how, with his presence. Indeed he does officiate as assistant to the sexton in his capacity of grave digger, chosen, as it should seem, from a natural fitness ; a fine sense of congruity in good Joseph Reed, the functionary in question, who felt, without knowing why, that, of all men in the parish, Isaac Bint was best fitted to that solemn office.

His remarkable gift of silence adds much to the impression produced by his remarkable figure. I don’t think that I ever heard him speak three words in my life. An approach of that bony hand to that earthy leather cap was the greatest effort of courtesy that my daily salutations could extort from him. For this silence, Isaac has reasons good. He hath a reputation to support. His words are too precious to be wasted.

Our mole-catcher, ragged as he looks, is the wise man of the village, the oracle of the village-inn, foresees the weather, charms away agues, tells fortunes by the stars, and writes notes upon the almanack—turning and twisting about the predictions after a fashion so ingenious, that its a moot point which is oftenest wrong—Isaac Bint, or Francis Moore. In one eminent instance, our friend was, however, eminently right. He had the good luck to prophesy, before sundry witnesses—some of them sober—in the tap-room of the Bell—he then sitting, pipe in mouth, on the settle at the right-hand side of the fire, whilst Jacob Frost occupied the left;—he had the good fortune to foretel, on New Year's Day 1812, the downfall of Napoleon Bonaparte—a piece of soothsayership which has established his reputation, and dumbfounded all doubters and cavillers ever since; but which would certainly have been more striking if he had not annually uttered the same prediction, from the same place, from the time that the aforesaid Napoleon became first consul. But this small circumstance is entirely overlooked by Isaac and his admirers, and they believe in him, and he believes in the stars, more firmly than ever.

Our mole-catcher is, as might be conjectured, an old bachelor. Your married men hath more of this world about him—is less, so to say, planet-struck. A thorough old bachelor is Isaac, a contemner and maligner of the

sex, a complete and decided woman-hater. Female frailty is the only subject on which he hath ever been known to dilate ; he will not even charm away their agues, or tell their fortunes, and, indeed, holds them to be unworthy the notice of the stars.

No woman contaminates his household. He lives on the edge of a pretty bit of woodland scenery, called the Penge, in a snug cottage of two rooms, of his own building, surrounded by a garden cribbed from the waste, well fenced with quickset, and well stocked with fruit-trees, herbs, and flowers. One large apple-tree extends over the roof—a pretty bit of colour when in blossom, contrasted with the thatch of the little dwelling, and relieved by the dark wood behind. Although the owner be solitary, his demesne is sufficiently populous. A long row of bee-hives extends along the warmest side of the garden—for Isaac's honey is celebrated far and near; a pig occupies a commodious sty at one corner; and large flocks of ducks and geese (for which the Penge, whose glades are intersected by water, is famous) are generally waiting round a back gate leading to a spacious shed, far larger than Isaac's own cottage, which serves for their feeding and roosting-place. The great tameness of all these creatures—for the ducks and geese flutter round him the moment he approaches, and the very pig follows him like a dog—gives no equivocal testimony of the kindness of our mole-catcher's nature.

A circumstance of recent occurrence puts his humanity beyond doubt.

Amongst the probable causes of Isaac's dislike to women, may be reckoned the fact of his living in a female neighbourhood (for the Penge is almost peopled with duck-rearers and goose-crammers of the duck and goose gender) and being himself exceedingly unpopular amongst the fair poultry-feeders of that watery vicinity. He beat them at their own weapons ; produced at Midsummer geese fit for Michaelmas ; and raised ducks so precocious, that the gardeners complained of them as forerunning their vegetable accompaniments ; and “ panting *peas* toiled after them in vain.” In short the Naiads of the Penge had the mortification to find themselves driven out of B—— market by an interloper, and that interloper a man, who had no manner of right to possess any skill in an accomplishment so exclusively feminine as duck-rearing ; and being no ways inferior in another female accomplishment, called scolding, to their sister-nymphs of Billingsgate, they sat up a clamour and a cackle which might rival the din of their own gooseries at feeding-time, and would inevitably have frightened from the field any competitor less impenetrable than our hero. But Isaac is not a man to shrink from so small an evil as female objurgation. He stalked through it all in mute disdain—looking now at his mole-traps, and now at the stars—pretending not to hear,

and very probably not hearing. At first this scorn, more provoking than any retort, only excited his enemies to fresh attacks ; but one cannot be always answering another person's silence. The flame which had blazed so fiercely, at last burnt itself out, and peace reigned once more in the green alleys of Penge-wood.

One, however, of his adversaries—his nearest neighbour—still remained unsilenced.

Margery Grover was a very old and poor woman, whom age and disease had bent almost to the earth ; shaken by palsy, pinched by penury, and soured by misfortune—a moving bundle of misery and rags. Two centuries ago she would have been burnt for a witch ; now she starved and grumbled on the parish allowance ; trying to eke out a scanty subsistence by the dubious profits gained from the produce of two geese and a lame gander, once the unmolested tenants of a greenish pool, situate right between her dwelling and Isaac's, but whose watery dominion had been invaded by his flourishing colony.

This was the cause of feud ; and although Isaac would willingly, from a mingled sense of justice and of pity, have yielded the point to the poor old creature, especially as ponds are there almost as plentiful as blackberries, yet it was not so easy to control the habits and inclinations of their feathered subjects, who all perversely fancied that particular pool ; and various acci-

dents and skirmishes occurred, in which the ill-fed and weak birds of Margery had generally the worst of the fray. One of her early goslings was drowned—an accident which may happen even to water-fowl; and her lame gander, a sort of pet with the poor old woman, injured in his well leg; and Margery vented curses as bitter as those of Sycorax; and Isaac, certainly the most superstitious personage in the parish—the most thorough believer in his own gifts and predictions—was fain to nail a horse-shoe on his door for the defence of his property, and to wear one of his own ague charms about his neck for his personal protection.

Poor old Margery! A hard winter came; and the feeble, tottering creature shook in the frosty air like an aspen-leaf; and the hovel in which she dwelt—for nothing could prevail on her to try the shelter of the workhouse—shook like herself at every blast. She was not quite alone either in the world or in her poor hut: husband, children, and grandchildren had passed away; but one young and innocent being, a great grandson, the last of her descendants, remained, a helpless dependent on one almost as helpless as himself.

Little Harry Grover was a shrunken, stunted boy, of five years old; tattered and squalid, like his grandame; and, at first sight, presented almost as miserable a specimen of childhood, as Margery herself did of age. There was even a likeness between them; although the

fierce blue eye of Margery had, in the boy, a mild appealing look, which entirely changed the whole expression of the countenance. A gentle and a peaceful boy was Harry, and, above all, a useful. It was wonderful how many ears of corn in the autumn, and sticks in the winter, his little hands could pick up ! how well he could make a fire, and boil the kettle, and sweep the hearth, and cram the goslings ! Never was a handier boy or a trustier ; and when the united effects of cold, and age, and rheumatism confined poor Margery to her poor bed, the child continued to perform his accustomed offices ; fetching the money from the vestry, buying the loaf at the baker's, keeping house, and nursing the sick woman, with a kindness and thoughtfulness, which none but those who know the careful ways to which necessity trains cottage children would deem credible ; and Margery, a woman of strong passions, strong prejudices, and strong affections, who had lived in and for the desolate boy, felt the approach of death embittered by the certainty that the workhouse, always the scene of her dread and loathing, would be the only refuge for the poor orphan.

Death, however, came on visibly and rapidly ; and she sent for the overseer to beseech him to put Harry to board in some decent cottage ; she could not die in peace until he had promised ; the fear of the innocent child's being contaminated by wicked boys and godless

women preyed upon her soul ; she implored, she conjured. The overseer, a kind but timid man, hesitated, and was beginning a puzzled speech about the bench and the vestry, when another voice was heard from the door of the cottage.

" Margery," said our friend Isaac, " will you trust Harry to me ? I am a poor man, to be sure ; but, between earning and saving, there'll be enough for me and little Harry. 'Tis as good a boy as ever lived, and I'll try to keep him so. Trust him to me, and I'll be a father to him. I can't say more."

" God bless thee, Isaac Bint ! God bless thee !" was all poor Margery could reply.

They were the last words she ever spoke. And little Harry is living with our good mole-catcher, and is growing plump and rosy ; and Margery's other pet, the lame gander, lives and thrives with them too.

MADEMOISELLE THÉRÈSE.

ONE of the prettiest dwellings in our neighbourhood, is the Lime Cottage at Burley-Hatch. It consists of a small low-browed habitation, so entirely covered with jessamine, honeysuckle, passion-flowers, and china roses, as to resemble a bower, and is placed in the centre of a large garden,—turf and flowers before, vegetables and fruit trees behind, backed by a superb orchard, and surrounded by a quickset hedge, so thick, and close, and regular, as to form an impregnable defence to the territory which it encloses—a thorny rampart, a living and growing *chevaux-de-frise*. On either side of the neat gravel walk, which leads from the outer gate to the door of the cottage, stand the large and beautiful trees to which it owes its name; spreading their strong, broad shadow over the turf beneath, and sending, on a summer afternoon, their rich, spicy fragrance half across the irregular village green, dappled with wood and water, and gay with sheep, cattle, and children, which divides them,

at the distance of a quarter of a mile, from the little hamlet of Burley, its venerable church and handsome rectory, and its short straggling street of cottages, and country shops.

Such is the habitation of Thérèse de G., an emigrée of distinction, whose aunt having married an English officer, was luckily able to afford her niece an asylum during the horrors of the Revolution, and to secure to her a small annuity and the Lime Cottage after her death. There she has lived for these five-and-thirty years, gradually losing sight of her few and distant foreign connexions, and finding all her happiness in her pleasant home and her kind neighbours—a standing lesson of cheerfulness and contentment.

A very popular person is Mademoiselle Thérèse—popular both with high and low; for the prejudice which the country people almost universally entertain against foreigners, vanished directly before the charm of her manners, the gaiety of her heart, and the sunshine of a temper that never knows a cloud. She is so kind to them too, so liberal of the produce of her orchard and garden, so full of resource in their difficulties, and so sure to afford sympathy if she have nothing else to give, that the poor all idolise Mademoiselle. Among the rich, she is equally beloved. No party is complete without the pleasant Frenchwoman, whose amability and cheerfulness, her perfect, general politeness, her atten-

tion to the old, the poor, the stupid, and the neglected, are felt to be invaluable in society. Her conversation is not very powerful either, nor very brilliant; she never says any thing remarkable—but then it is so good-natured, so genuine, so unpretending, so constantly up and alive, that one would feel its absence far more than that of a more showy and ambitious talker;—to say nothing of the charm which it derives from her language, which is alternately the most graceful and purest French, and the most diverting and absurd broken English;—a dialect in which, whilst contriving to make herself perfectly understood both by gentle and simple, she does also contrive, in the course of an hour, to commit more blunders, than all the other foreigners in England make in a month.

Her appearance betrays her country almost as much as her speech. She is a French-looking little personage, with a slight, active figure, exceedingly nimble and alert in every movement; a round and darkly-complexioned face, somewhat faded and *passée*, but still striking from the laughing eyes, the bland and brilliant smile, and the great mobility of expression. Her features, pretty as they are, want the repose of an English countenance; and her air, gesture, and dress, are decidedly foreign, all alike deficient in the English charm of quietness. Nevertheless, in her youth, she must have been pretty; so pretty that some of our young ladies, scandalised at

finding their favourite an old maid, have invented sundry legends to excuse the solecism, and talk of duels fought *pour l'amour de ses beaux yeux*, and of a betrothed lover guillotined in the Revolution. And the thing may have been so; although one meets every where with old maids who have been pretty, and whose lovers have not been guillotined; and although Mademoiselle Thérèse has not, to do her justice, the least in the world the air of a heroine crossed in love. The thing may be so; but I doubt it much. I rather suspect our fair Demoiselle of having been in her youth a little of a flirt. Even during her residence at Burley-Hatch, hath not she indulged in divers very distant, very discreet, very decorous, but still very evident flirtations? Did not Doctor Abdy, the portly, ruddy schoolmaster of B., dangle after her for three mortal years, holidays excepted? And did she not refuse him at last? And Mr. Foreclose, the thin, withered, wrinkled city solicitor, a man, so to say, smoke-dried, who comes down every year to Burley for the air, did not he do suit and service to her during four long-vacations, with the same ill success? Was not Sir Thomas himself a little smitten? Nay, even now, does not the good major, a halting veteran of seventy—but really it is too bad to tell tales out of the parish—all that is certain is, that Mademoiselle Thérèse might have changed her name long before now, had she so chosen;

and that it is most probable that she will never change it at all.

Her household consists of her little maid Betsy, a cherry-cheeked, blue-eyed country lass, brought up by herself, who, with a full clumsy figure, and a fair, innocent, unmeaning countenance, copies, as closely as these obstacles will permit, the looks and gestures of her alert and vivacious mistress, and has even caught her broken English ;—of a fat lap-dog, called Fido, silky, sleepy and sedate ;—and of a beautiful white Spanish ass, called Donnabella, an animal docile and spirited, far beyond the generality of that despised race, who draws her little donkey-chaise half the country over, runs to her the moment she sees her, and eats roses, bread and apples from her hand ; but who, accustomed to be fed and groomed, harnessed and driven only by females, resists and rebels the moment she is approached by the rougher sex ; has overturned more boys, and kicked more men, than any donkey in the kingdom ; and has acquired such a character for restiveness amongst the grooms in the neighbourhood, that when Mademoiselle Thérèse goes out to dinner, Betsy is fain to go with her to drive Donnabella home again, and to return to fetch her mistress in the evening.

If every body is delighted to receive this most welcome visitor, so is every body delighted to accept her

graceful invitations, and meet to eat strawberries at Burley-Hatch. Oh, how pleasant are those summer afternoons, sitting under the blossomed limes, with the sun shedding a golden light through the broad branches, the bees murmuring over head, roses and lilies all about us, and the choicest fruit served up in wicker baskets of her own making—itself a picture ! the guests looking so pleased and happy, and the kind hostess the gayest and happiest of all. Those are pleasant meetings ; nor are her little winter parties less agreeable, when to two or three female friends assembled round their coffee, she will tell thrilling stories of that terrible Revolution, so fertile in great crimes and great virtues ; or gayer anecdotes of the brilliant days preceding that convulsion, the days which Madame de Genlis has described so well, when Paris was the capital of pleasure, and amusement the business of life ; illustrating her descriptions by a series of spirited drawings of costumes and characters done by herself, and always finishing by producing a group of Louis Seize, Marie Antoinette, the Dauphin, and Madame Elizabeth, as she had last seen them at Versailles—the only recollection that ever brings tears into her smiling eyes.

Mademoiselle Thérèse's loyalty to the Bourbons, was in truth a very real feeling. Her family had been about the court, and she had imbibed an enthusiasm

for the royal sufferers natural to a young and a warm heart—she loved the Bourbons, and hated Napoleon with like ardour. All her other French feelings had for some time been a little modified. She was not quite so sure as she had been, that France was the only country, and Paris the only city of the world ; that Shakespeare was a barbarian, and Milton no poet ; that the perfume of English limes, was nothing compared to French orange trees ; that the sun never shone in England ; and that sea-coal fires were bad things. She still, indeed, would occasionally make these assertions, especially if dared to make them ; but her faith in them was shaken. Her loyalty to her legitimate king, was, however, as strong as ever, and that loyalty had nearly cost us our dear Mademoiselle. After the Restoration, she hastened as fast as steam-boat and diligence could carry her, to enjoy the delight of seeing once more the Bourbons at the Thuilleries ; took leave, between smiles and tears, of her friends, and of Burley-Hatch, carrying with her a branch of the lime-tree, then in blossom, and commissioning her old lover, Mr. Foreclose, to dispose of the cottage : but in less than three months, luckily before Mr. Foreclose had found a purchaser, Mademoiselle Thérèse came home again. She complained of nobody ; but times were altered. The house in which she was born was pulled down ; her friends were scattered, her kindred dead ; Madame did

not remember her (she had probably never heard of her in her life) ; the king did not know her again (poor man ! he had not seen her for these thirty years) ; Paris was a new city ; the French were a new people ; she missed the sea-coal fires ; and for the stunted orange-trees at the Tuilleries, what were they compared with the blossomed limes of Burley-Hatch !

LOST AND FOUND.

ANY body may be lost in a wood. It is well for me to have so good an excuse for my wanderings; for I am rather famous for such misadventures, and have sometimes been accused by my kindest friends of committing intentional blunders, and going astray out of malice prepense. To be sure, when in two successive rambles I contrived to get mazed on Burghfield Common, and bewildered in Kibe's Lane, those exploits did seem to overpass the common limits of stupidity. But in a wood, and a strange wood, a new place, a fresh country, untrodden ground beneath the feet, unknown landmarks before the eyes, wiser folks than I might require the silken clue of Rosamond, or the bag of ashes given to Finette Cendron (Anglice, Cinderella) by the good fairy her godmother, to help them home again. Now my luck exceeded even her's of the Glass Slipper, for I found something not unlike the good fairy herself, in the pleasant earthly guise of an old friend. But I may as well begin my story.

About two years ago we had the misfortune to lose one of the most useful and popular inhabitants of our village, Mrs. Bond, the butterwoman. She—for although there was a very honest and hardworking Farmer Bond, who had the honour to be Mrs. Bond's husband, she was so completely the personage of the family that nobody ever thought of him—she lived on a small dairy-farm, at the other side of the parish, where she had reared ten children in comfort and respectability, contriving in all years, and in all seasons, to look, and to be flourishing, happy, and contented; and to drive her tilted cart twice a week into E., laden with the richest butter, the freshest eggs, and the finest poultry of the county. Never was market-woman so reliable as Mrs. Bond, so safe to deal with, or so pleasant to look at. She was a neat comely woman of five-and-forty, or thereabout, with dark hair, laughing eyes, a bright smile, and a brighter complexion—red and white like a daisy. People used to say how pretty she must have been; but I think she was then in the prime of her good looks; just as a full-blown damask rose is more beautiful than the same flower in the bud.

Very pleasant she was to look at, and still pleasanter to talk to; she was so gentle, so cheerful, so respectful, and so kind. Every body in the village loved Mrs. Bond. Even Lizzy and May, the two most aristocratic

tical of its inhabitants, and the most tenacious of the distinctions of rank, would run to meet the butter-cart as if it were a carriage and four. A mark of preference which the good-humoured dairywoman did not fail to acknowledge and confirm by gifts suited to their respective tastes, an occasional pitcher of buttermilk to May, and a stick with cherries tied round it to poor Lizzy.

Nor was Mrs. Bond's bounty confined to largesses of so suspicious a nature, as presents to the pets of a good customer. I have never known any human being more thoroughly and universally generous, more delicate in her little gifts, or with so entire an absence of design or artifice in her attentions. It was a prodigality of kindness that seemed never weary of well-doing. What posies of pinks and sweet-williams, backed by marjoram and rosemary, she used to carry to the two poor old ladies who lodged at the pastry-cook's at B.! What faggots of lilac and liburnum she would bring to deck the poor widow Hay's open hearth! What baskets of watercresses, the brownest, the bitterest, and the crispest of the year, for our fair neighbour, the nymph of the shoe-shop, a delicate girl, who could only be tempted into her breakfast by that pleasant herb! What pots of honey for John Brown's cough! What gooseberries and currants for the baker's little children! And as soon as her great vine ripened, what grapes for every body!

No wonder that when Mrs. Bond left the parish, to occupy a larger farm in a distant county, her absence was felt as a misfortune by the whole village; that poor Lizzy enquired after her every day for a week, and that May watched for the tilted cart every Wednesday and Friday for a month or more.

I myself joined very heartily in the general lamentation. But time and habit reconcile us to most privations, and I must confess, that much as I liked her, I had nearly forgotten our good butterwoman, until an adventure which befel me last week placed me once more in the way of her ready kindness.

I was on a visit at a considerable distance from home, in one of the most retired parts of Oxfordshire. Nothing could be more beautiful than the situation, or less accessible; shut in amongst woody hills, remote from great towns, with deep chalky roads, almost impassable, and a broad bridgeless river, coming, as if to intercept your steps, whenever you did seem to have fallen into a beaten track. It was exactly the country and the season in which to wander about all day long.

One fair morning I sat out on my accustomed ramble. The sun was intensely hot; the sky almost cloudless; I had climbed a long abrupt ascent, to enjoy the sight of the magnificent river, winding like a snake amidst the richly-clothed hills; the pretty village, with its tapering spire, and the universal freshness and brilliancy of the

gay and smiling prospect—too gay perhaps! I gazed till I became dazzled with the glare of the sunshine, oppressed by the very brightness, and turned into a beech-wood by the side of the road, to seek relief from the overpowering radiance. These beech-woods should rather be called coppices. They are cut down occasionally, and consist of long flexible stems, growing out of the old roots. But they are like no other coppices, or rather none other can be compared with them. The young beechen stems, perfectly free from underwood, go arching and intertwining over head, forming a thousand mazy paths, covered by a natural trellis; the shining green leaves, just bursting from their golden sheaths, contrasting with the smooth silvery bark, shedding a cool green light around, and casting a thousand dancing shadows on the mossy flowery path, pleasant to the eye and to the tread, a fit haunt for wood-nymph or fairy. There is always much of interest in the mystery of a wood; the uncertainty produced by the confined boundary; the objects which crowd together, and prevent the eye from penetrating to distance; the strange flickering mixture of shadow and sunshine, the sudden flight of birds—oh, it was enchanting! I wandered on, quite regardless of time or distance, now admiring the beautiful wood-sorrel which sprang up amongst the old roots—now plucking the fragrant wood-roof—now trying to count the countless varieties of woodland-moss,

till, at length, roused by my foot's catching in a rich trail of the white-veined ivy, which crept, wreathing and interlaced, over the ground, I became aware that I was completely lost, had entirely forsaken all track, and out-travelled all landmarks. The wood was, I knew, extensive, and the ground so tumbled about, that every hundred yards presented some flowery slope or broken dell, which added greatly to the picturesqueness of the scenery, but very much diminished my chance of discovery or extrication.

In this emergency, I determined to proceed straight onward, trusting in this way to reach at last one side of the wood, although I could not at all guess which; and I was greatly solaced, after having walked about a quarter of a mile, to find myself crossed by a rude cart track; and still more delighted, on proceeding a short distance farther, to hear sounds of merriment and business; none of the softest, certainly, but which gave token of rustic habitation; and to emerge suddenly from the close wood, amongst an open grove of huge old trees, oaks, with their brown plaited leaves, cherries, covered with snowy garlands, and beeches, almost as gigantic as those of Windsor Park, contrasting, with their enormous trunks and majestic spread of bough, the light and flexible stems of the coppice I had left.

I had come out at one of the highest points of the wood, and now stood on a platform overlooking a scene of extraordinary beauty. A little to the right, in a very narrow valley, stood an old farm-house, with pointed roofs and porch and pinnacles, backed by a splendid orchard, which lay bathed in the sunshine, exhaling its fresh aromatic fragrance, all one flower ; just under me was a strip of rich meadow land, through which a stream ran sparkling, and directly opposite a ridge of hanging coppices, surrounding and crowning, as it were, an immense old chalk-pit, which, overhung by bramble, ivy, and a hundred pendent weeds, irregular and weather-stained, had an air as venerable and romantic as some grey ruin. Seen in the gloom and stillness of evening, or by the pale glimpses of the moon, it would have required but little aid from the fancy to picture out the broken shafts and mouldering arches of some antique abbey. But, besides that daylight is the sworn enemy of such illusions, my attention was imperiously claimed by a reality of a very different kind. One of the gayest and noisiest operations of rural life—sheep-washing—was going on in the valley below—

“ the turmoil that unites
Clamour of boys with innocent despites
Of barking dogs, and bleatings from strange fear.”

WORDSWORTH.

All the inhabitants of the farm seemed assembled in the meadow. I counted a dozen at least of men and boys of all ages, from the stout, sunburnt, vigorous farmer of fifty, who presided over the operation, down to the eight-year old urchin, who, screaming, running, and shaking his ineffectual stick after an eloped sheep, served as a sort of aide-de-camp to the sheep-dog. What a glorious scene of confusion it was ! what shouting ! what scuffling ! what glee ! Four or five young men and one amazon of a barefooted girl, with her petticoats tucked up to her knees, stood in the water where it was pent between two hurdles, ducking, sousing and holding down by main force, the poor, frightened, struggling sheep, who kicked, and plunged, and bleated, and butted, and in spite of their imputed innocence, would certainly, in the ardour of self-defence, have committed half-a-dozen homicides, if their power had equalled their inclination. The rest of the party were fully occupied ; some in conducting the purified sheep, who showed a strong disposition to go the wrong way, back to their quarters ; others in leading the uncleaned part of the flock to their destined ablution, from which they also testified a very ardent and active desire to escape. Dogs, men, boys, and girls were engaged in marshalling these double processions, the order of which was constantly interrupted by the out-

breaking of some runaway sheep, who turned the march into a pursuit, to the momentary increase of the din, which seemed already to have reached the highest possible pitch.

The only quiet persons in the field were a delicate child of nine years old, and a blooming woman of forty-five—a comely blooming woman, with dark hair, bright eyes, and a complexion like a daisy, who stood watching the sheep-washers with the happiest smiles, and was evidently the mother of half the lads and lasses in the mêlée. It could be, and it was no other than my friend Mrs. Bond, and resolving to make myself and my difficulties known to her, I scrambled down no very smooth or convenient path, and keeping a gate between me and the scene of action, contrived, after sundry efforts, to attract her attention.

Here of course my difficulties ceased. But if I were to tell how glad she was to see her old neighbour, how full of kind questions and of hospitable cares,—how she would cut the great cake intended for the next day's sheep-shearing, would tap her two-year old currant wine, would gather a whole bush of early honeysuckles, and, finally, would see me home herself, I being, as she observed, rather given to losing my way:—if I were to tell all these things, when should I have done? I will rather conclude in the words

of an old French Fairy tale—Je crains déjà d'avoir abusé de la patience du lecteur. Je finis avant qu'il me dise de finir.

THE END.

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